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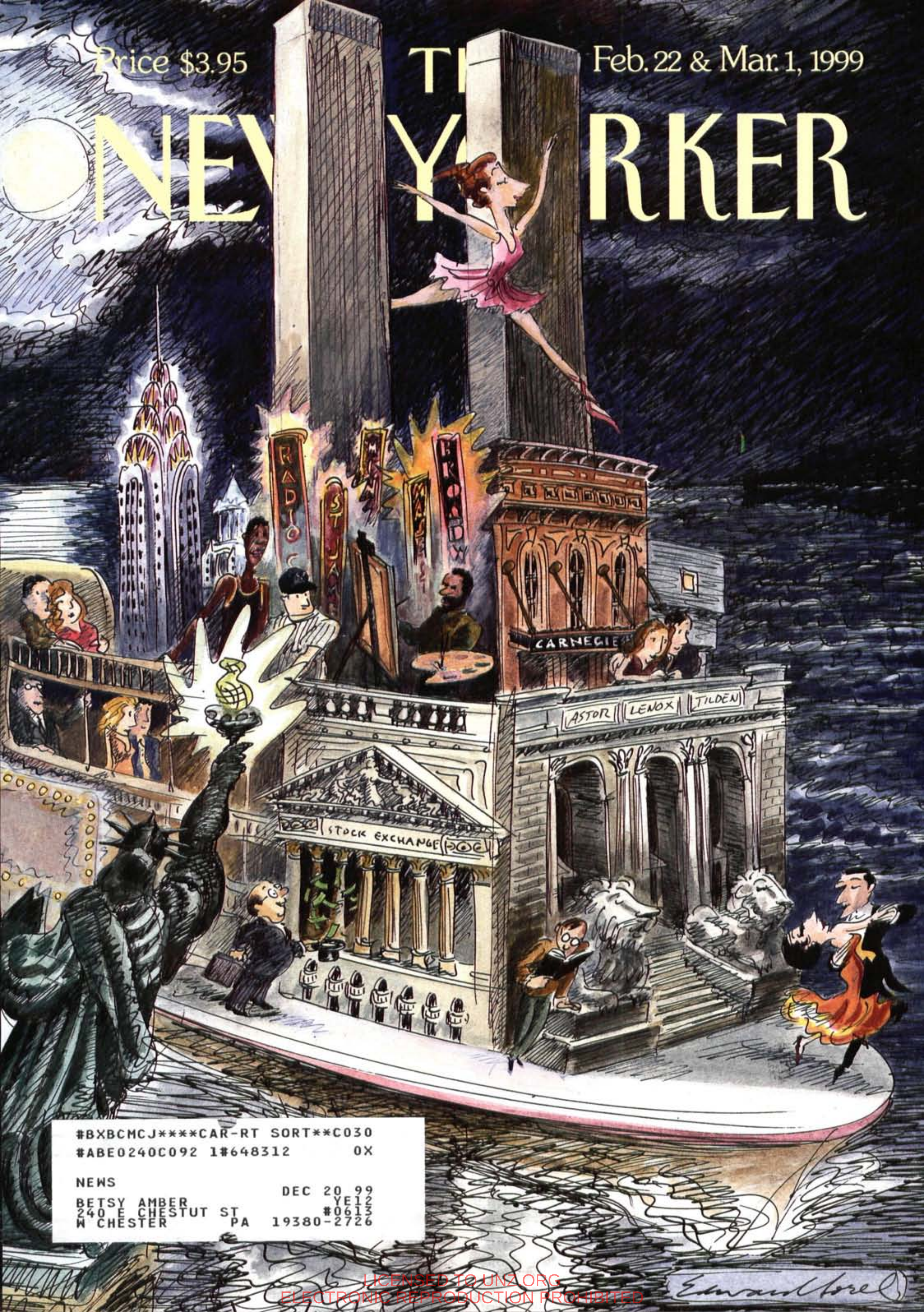

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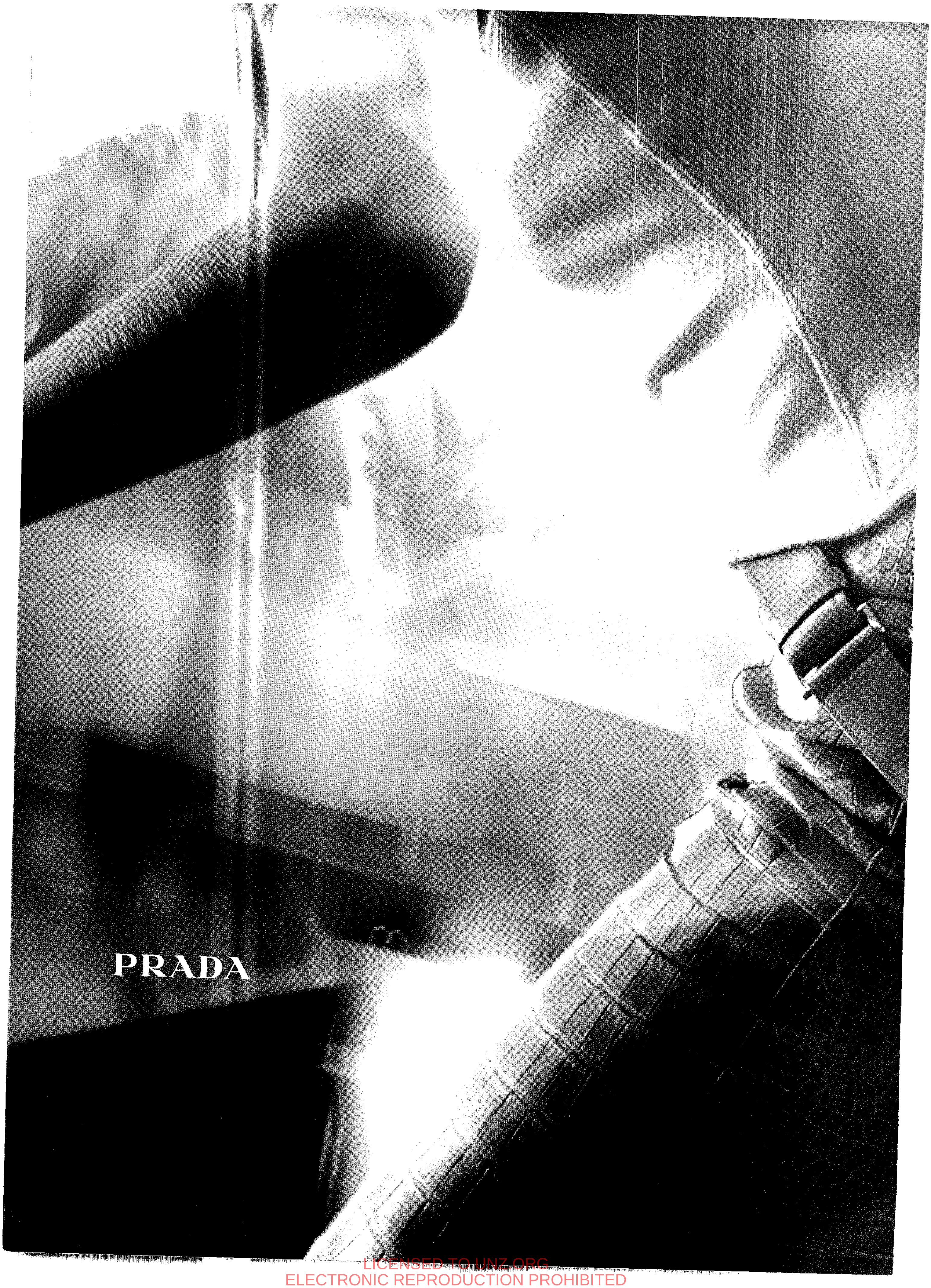
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NEW YORK ISSUE

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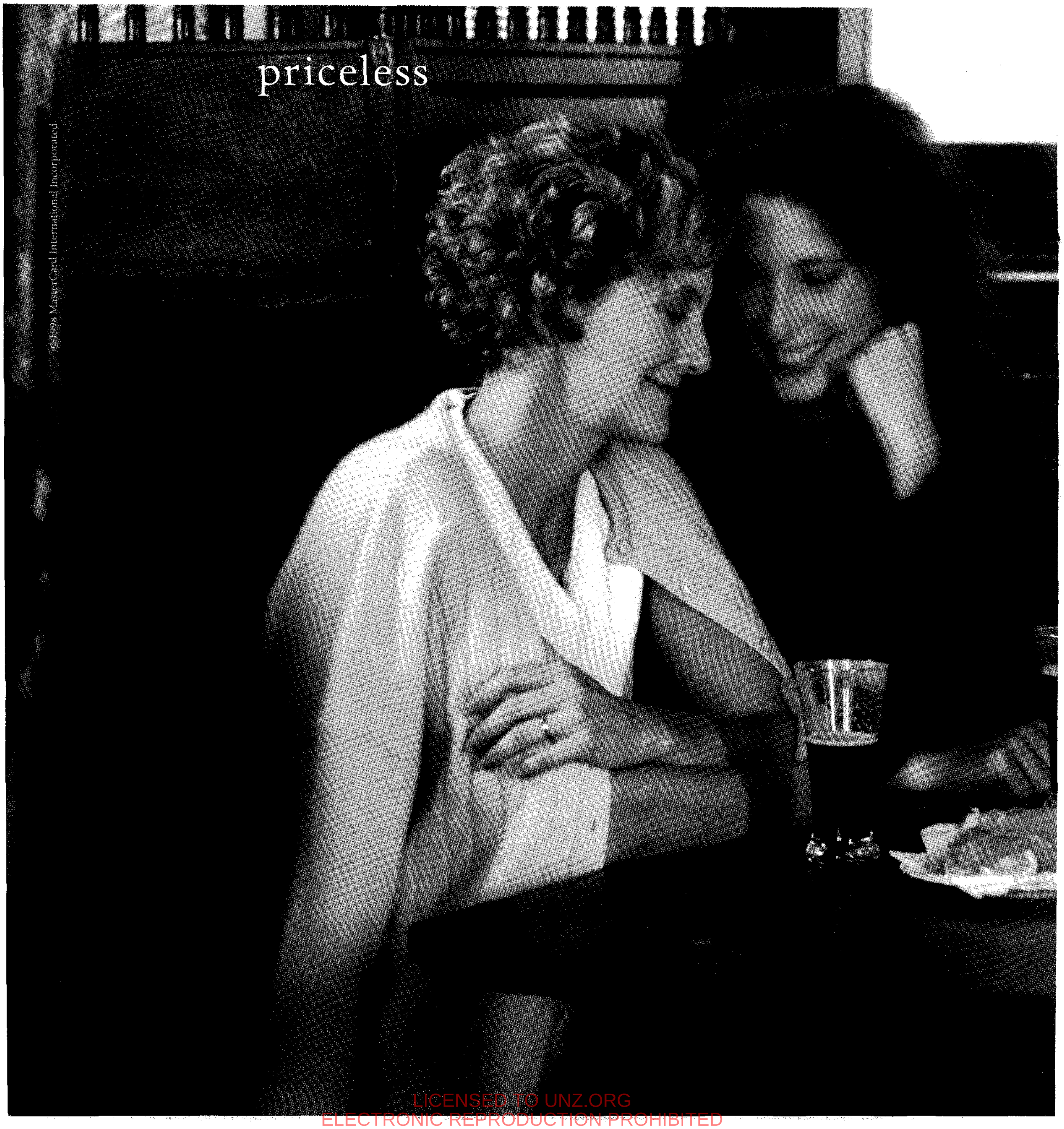

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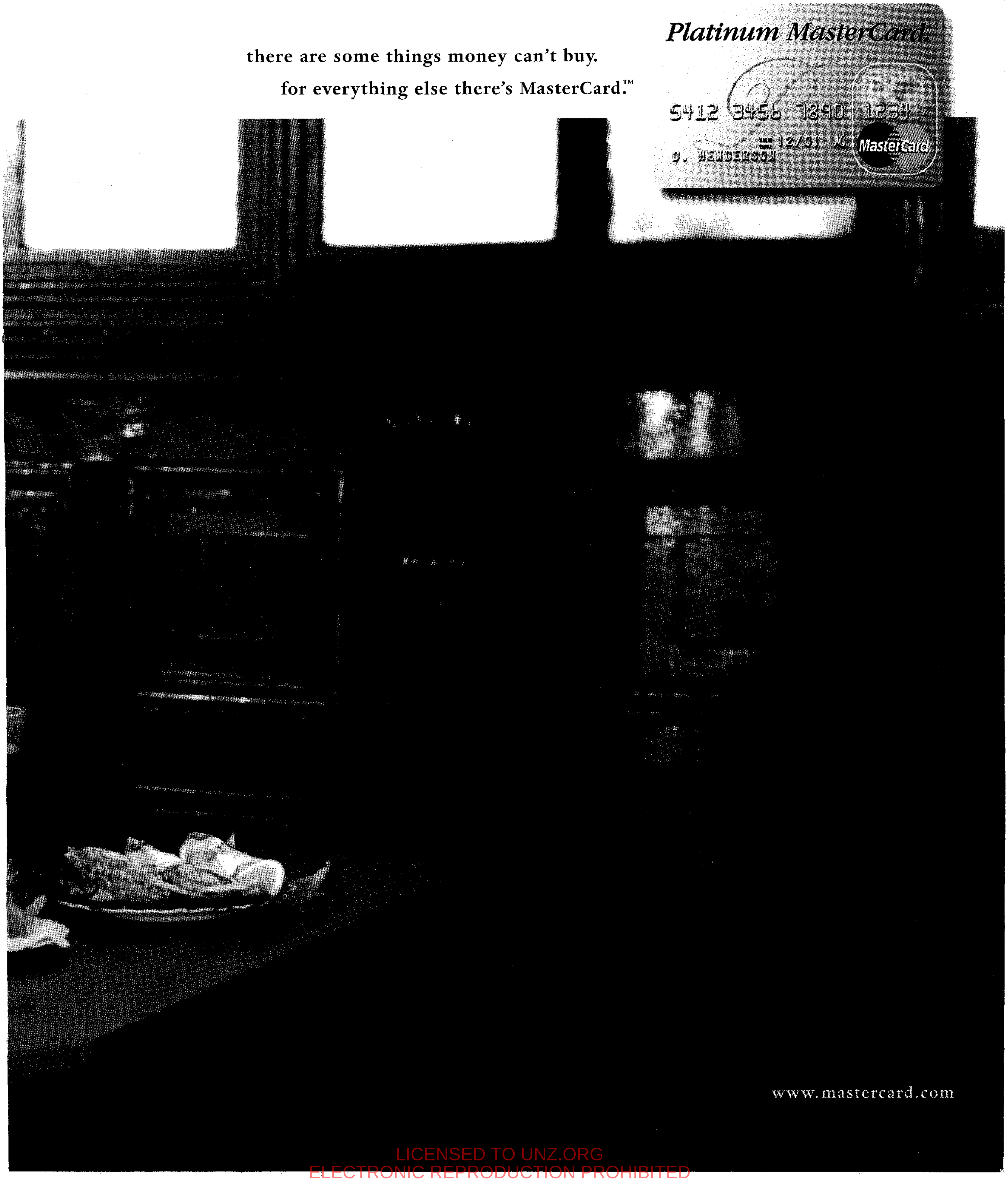
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CONTRIBUTORS

RICHARD AVEDON (Photographs, pp. 41, 104, 108, 115, 120, 124, 134, 135, 146, 147, 149, 151, 160, 169; photomontages, pp. 112, 113, 130, 131, 139, 140, 141, 163) is working with Doon Arbus on "The Sixties," a visual oral history that will come out in October.

FRANK McCOURT ("New in Town," p. 50) is the author of "Angela's Ashes" and a forthcoming sequel, " 'Tis," which will be published in September.

PHILIP GOUREVITCH ("A Husband for Dil," p. 78) is the author of "We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda."

MARK SINGER ("Joe Mitchell's Secret," p. 142) has been a staff writer since 1974. His most recent book is "Citizen K: The Deeply Weird American Journey of Brett Kimberlin."

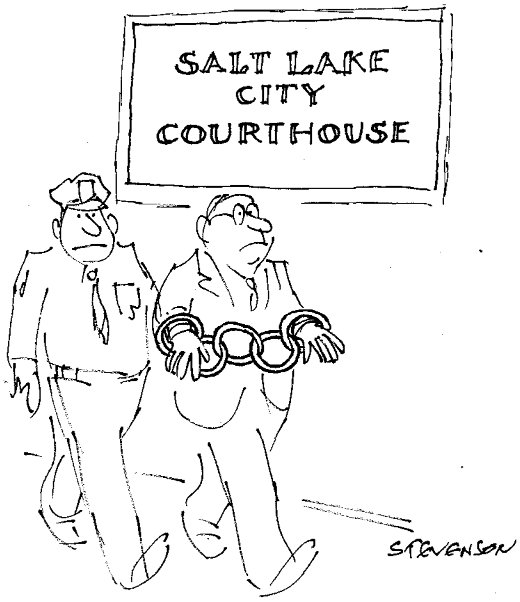
SUSAN ORLEAN ("I Want This Apartment," p. 63) has written three books, including "The Orchid Thief," which was published last month.

HILTON ALS ("The Dope Show," p. 132) is the author of "The Women," an extended essay on race and gender.

HENDRIK HERTZBERG ("Topless Tabloids of Gotham," p. 120) first started writing for *The New Yorker* in 1969. He rejoined the magazine in 1992, after an absence of fifteen years.

ELIZABETH KOLBERT ("Lighten Up," p. 58) is a political correspondent for *The New Yorker* and writes a regular column on local politics.

CYNTHIA OZICK ("The Synthetic Sublime," p. 152) is the author of three collections of essays and several novels, including "The Puttermesser Papers." ♦



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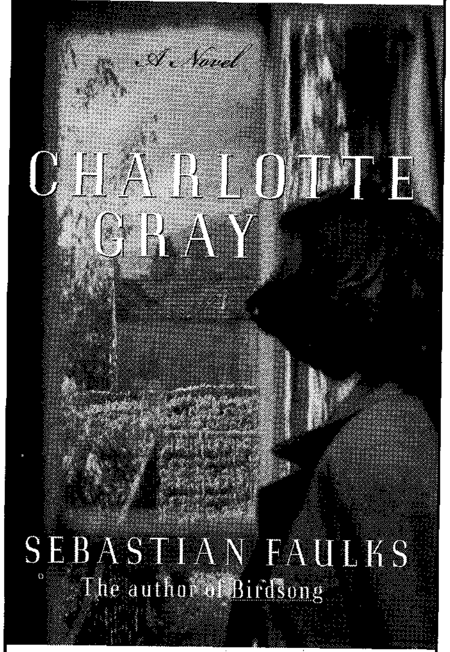

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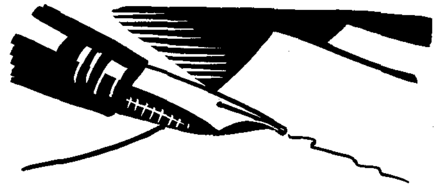

CONSUMING PASSIONS

In his article on Restoration Hardware (Annals of Consumption, "Acquired Taste," January 25th) David Brooks concludes that "today's educated élite is fundamentally different from past élites." But today's anxious yuppie consumers are not the first to fret about their own affluence or to seek "cultural restoration" through spending. Many turn-of-the-century Americans, repelled by Gilded Age extravagance, also earnestly sought to prove that they had not been "corrupted by materialism." They did so by embracing Gustave Stickley's bungalows and furniture and William Morris's Arts and Crafts decorations, meant to invoke images of preindustrial life. As Thorstein Veblen pointed out in 1899 in "The Theory of the Leisure Class," perfect but cheap machine-made goods had turned the visible imperfections of more expensive hand-made items into "marks of superiority." Like Brooks, Veblen saw right through an educated élite's desire to spend its way to virtuous simplicity. Bungalows filled with Mission furniture represented nothing but a more rustic form of conspicuous consumption.

JOHN HOLLITZ
Las Vegas, Nev.

The moneyed élite of the nineteen-eighties may have been guilty of excess and bad taste, but at least they weren't guilty of trying to pretend that their consumption was anything more than it appeared to be: a conspicuous attempt to gain status and attention.

MARC RANDAZZO
Allston, Mass.

John Cassidy's editorial about conspicuous consumption, presented as a review of several books on the subject ("No Satisfaction," January 25th), made me wonder why he would sneer at the popularity of high-quality items intended for outdoor recreation. I have little doubt that many people buy these items in pursuit of status, but at least the purchasers are apparently concerned with their own health and the environment. And envy of a neighbor's four-thousand-dollar gas grill or pricey golf clubs may be as foolish as any other kind of envy, but it should be recognized that the money is paying for high-quality items, mostly domestic, and so is creating jobs and encouraging craftsmanship. Isn't this kind of spending better all around than the accumulation of static prestige items such as gems, antiques, and the works of long-dead artists?

JEFFREY KOPP
Milwaukie, Ore.

REMEMBERING WILLY LOMAN

In his essay on the origins of Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman" (Life and Letters, January 25th), John Lahr reports that the play is performed "somewhere in the world almost every day of the year." This called to mind Willy's boast, shortly before his suicide, that his funeral would be enormous, attended by all the old-timers from New England, New York, and New Jersey, and his son Biff would realize, finally, that his father was "known." The play's final scene opens with the funeral. No one has come, of course. Yet by placing the audience at the scene Miller makes Willy's boast come true: every time the play is performed, people with "strange license plates" come from all over to pay tribute to this man.

KAREN SMITH
New York City

ARTISTIC LICENSE

Give us a break! To insert that well-worn face into that classic masterpiece (cover, "Woman of the Year," by Dean Rohrer, February 8th) is an insult of the greatest proportions.

PHYLLIS DAWSON
Stratford, Ont.

•

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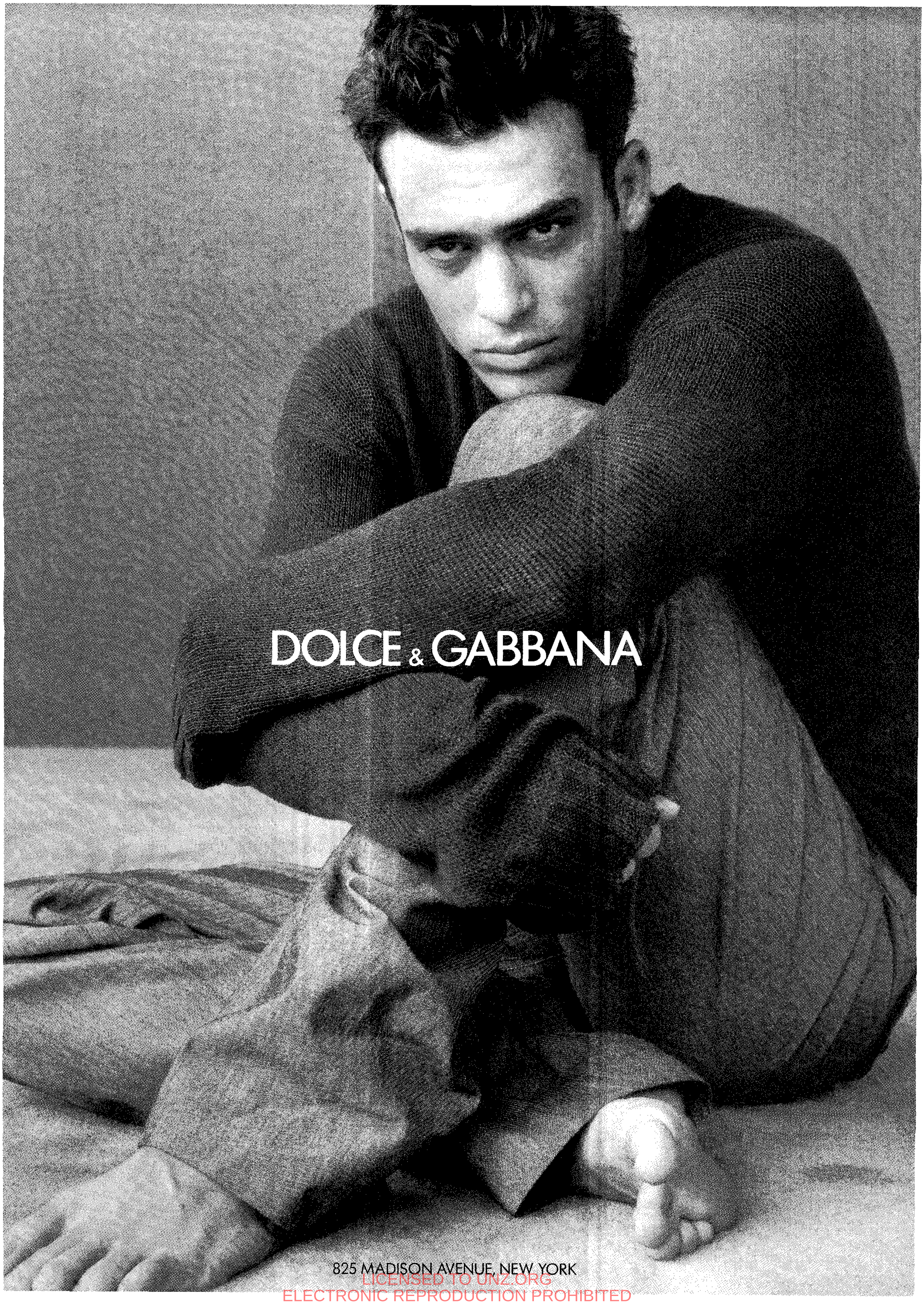
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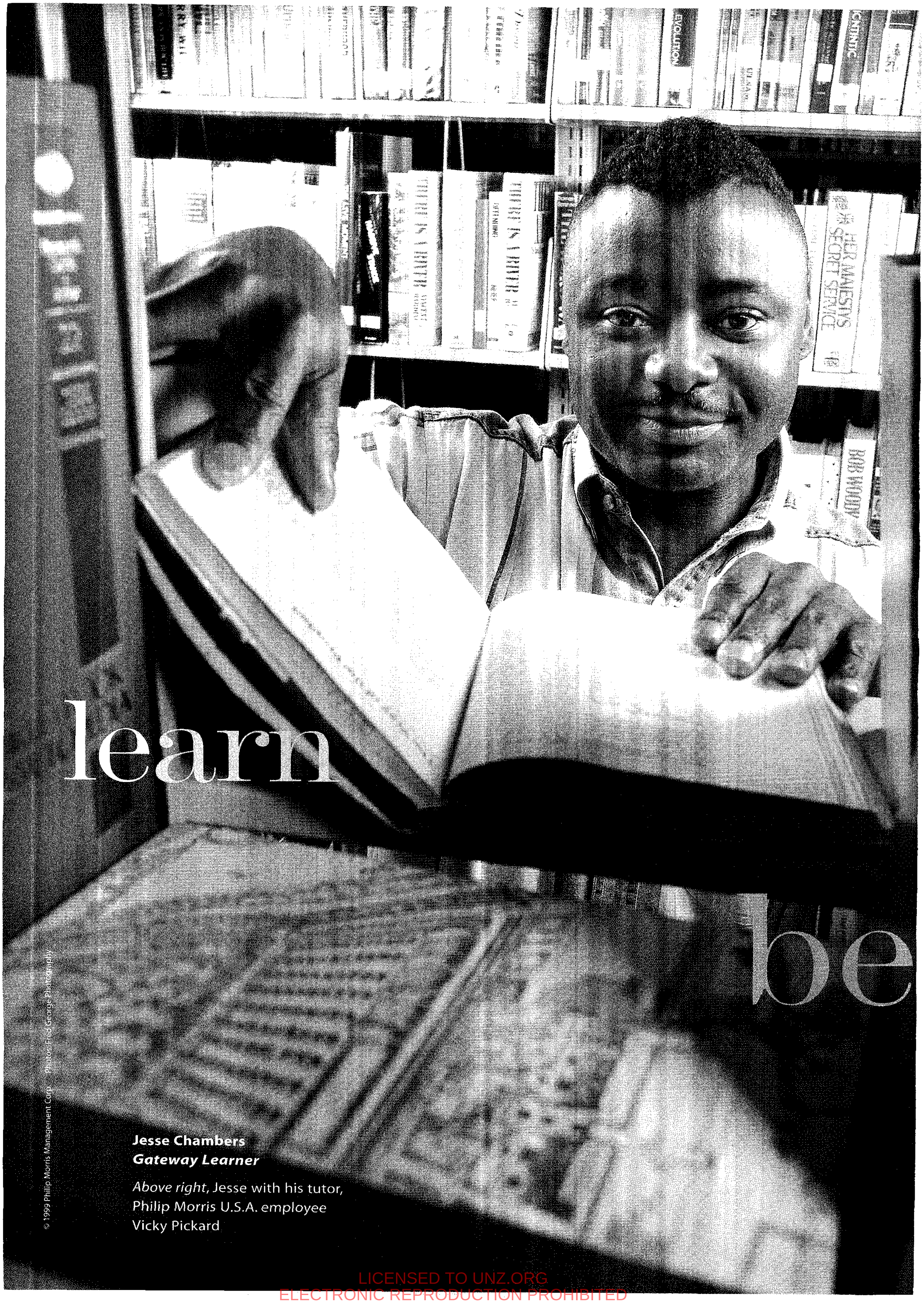

Jesse Chambers
Gateway Learner

Above right, Jesse with his tutor, Philip Morris U.S.A. employee Vicky Pickard

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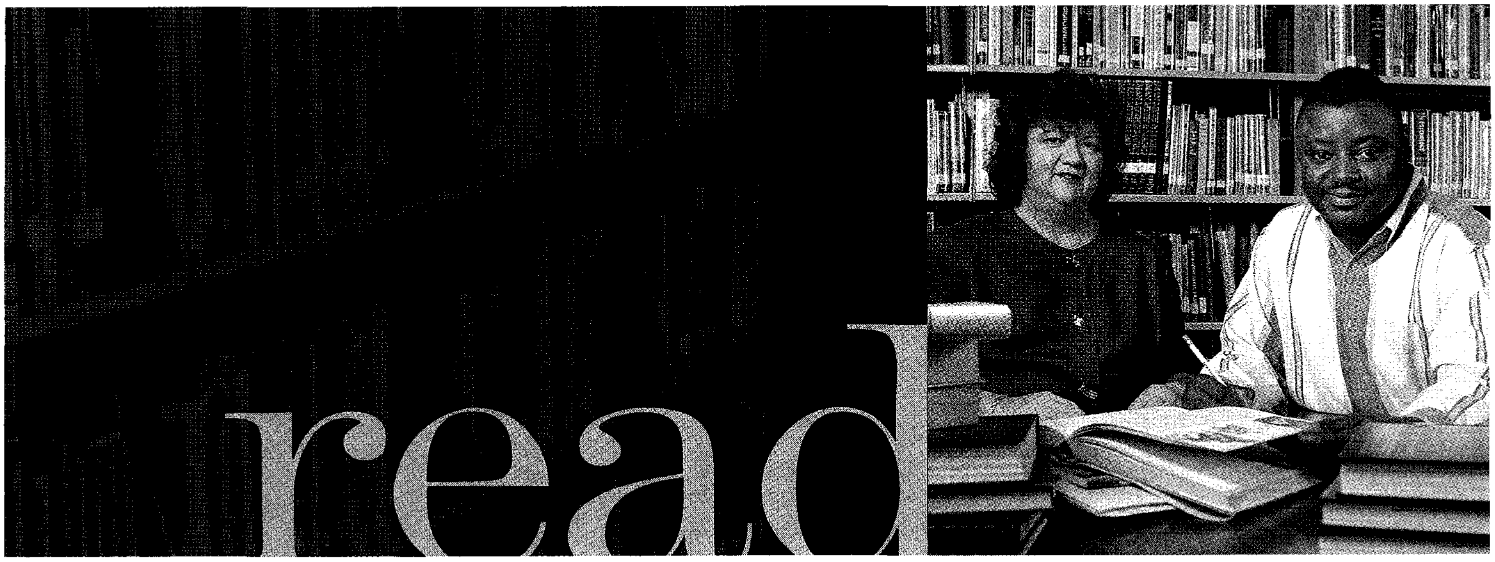

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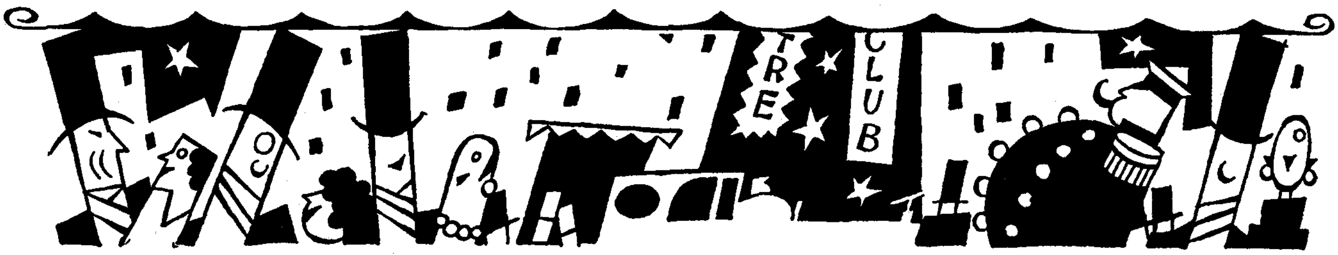

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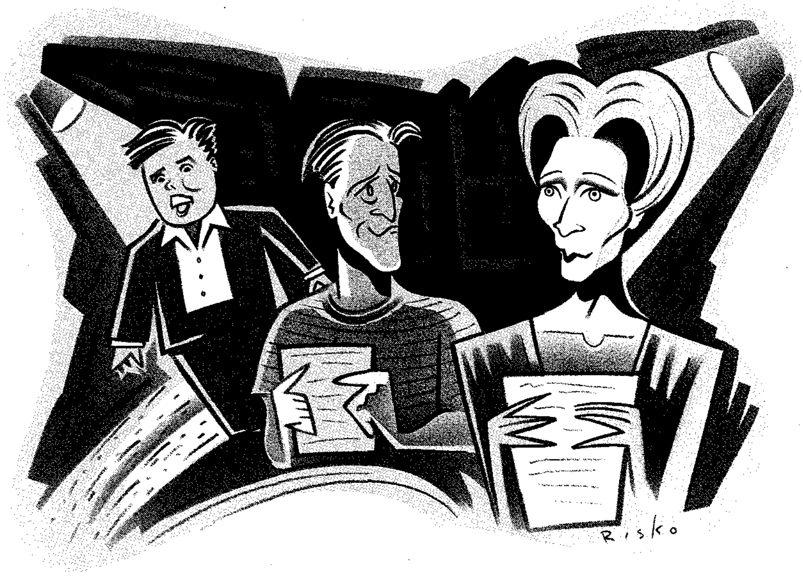
Annie Get Your Gun—Bernadette Peters stars as the sharpshooter Annie Oakley, in Irving Berlin's 1946 musical. Directed by Graciela Daniele. In previews. (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.)

Band in Berlin—A musical about the popular German sextet the Comedian Harmonists, three of whom were Jewish, who were banned by the Nazis on the ground that they were bad for the morale of Germany. They are portrayed by the sextet Hudson Shad. Previews begin Feb. 19. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Betty's Summer Vacation—A Hamptons share turns bad, in a new comedy by Christopher Durang. Directed by Nicholas Martin. Previews begin Feb. 19. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

Bright Lights, Big City—A musical version of the Jay McInerney novel, with a book, music, and lyrics by Paul Scott Goodman. Michael Greif ("Rent") is the director. In previews through Feb. 23. Opens Feb. 24 at 8. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 780-9037.)



Zak Orth, T. Scott Cunningham, and Betty Buckley, in "The Eros Trilogy," by Nicky Silver.

The Chemistry of Change—A gold-digger (Carlin Glynn) about to marry her tenth husband falls in love with a stranger (Larry Pine), in a dark comedy by Marlane Meyer. Lisa Peterson is the director. In previews through Feb. 20. Opens Feb. 21 at 7. (Theatre Four, 424 W. 55th St. 239-6200.)

Everybody's Ruby—Thulani Davis's new drama, set in Florida in 1952, centers on the murder of a prominent white doctor by a married black woman. Phylicia Rashad stars as the writer Zora Neale Hurston, who comes to town to report on the trial. Previews begin Feb. 23. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200.)

Halfway Home—From the New Group, a drama by Diane Bank, about a woman who returns home to her family in Iowa after ten years of living in New York City. In previews. (St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 279-4200.)

The Hothouse—An early Pinter comedy, in an Atlantic Theatre Company production directed by Karen Kohlhaas. In previews through Feb. 24. Opens Feb. 25 at 8. (336 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

The Lion in Winter—James Goldman's 1966 play stars Laurence Fishburne as Henry II and Stockard Channing as Eleanor of Aquitaine. Michael Mayer is the director. Previews begin Feb. 17. (Roundabout, Broadway at 45th St. 719-1300.)

The Mineola Twins—In Paula Vogel's dark comedy, Swoosie Kurtz portrays both a good sister and her evil twin. Directed by Joe Mantello. Preview on Feb. 17. Opens Feb. 18 at 7. (Laura Pels, Broadway at 45th St. 719-9300.)

Murder in America—A drama about post-millennial chaos, by Allen Blumberg. In previews through Feb. 22. Opens Feb. 23 at 6:30. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 279-4200.)

Night Must Fall—Matthew Broderick plays a psychopath, in a National Actors Theatre revival of Emlyn Williams's 1935 thriller, directed by John Tillinger. In previews through Feb. 20. Opens Feb. 21 at 6:30. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Not About Nightingales—Tennessee Williams's recently rediscovered early play, inspired by a 1938 prison uprising, is directed by Trevor Nunn. In previews through Feb. 24. Opens Feb. 25 at 6:15. (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

Les Quatre Filles du Dr. March—*New Yorker* cartoonist Victoria Roberts's one-woman show, a work in progress, is based on "Little Women," by Louisa May Alcott. Feb. 25 at 8. (Dixon Place, 258 Bowery, near Houston St. 219-3088.)

Running Man—The second musical in a trilogy about the black-American experience by Diedre Murray and Cornelius Eady. In previews through Feb. 23. Opens Feb. 24 at 8. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 647-0202.)

The Seagull—A Target Margin staging of Chekhov's play, directed by David Herskovits. In previews. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 358-3657.)

Things Fall Apart—Chinua Achebe's 1958 novel, about the ill effects of Christian missionary work on a Nigerian community, has been adapted for the stage by Biyi Bandele. Presented by the Performance Studio Workshop of Nigeria. Feb. 26-27 at 7:30 and Feb. 28 at 3. (Davis Hall, City College, Convent Ave. at 134th St. 650-7418.)

OPENED RECENTLY

Ashes to Ashes—The Roundabout Theatre Company's staging of Harold Pinter's new play, directed by Karel Reisz, stars Lindsay Duncan and David Strathairn. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Gramercy Theatre, 127 E. 23rd St. 777-4900.)

Beautiful Thing—Jonathan Harvey's 1993 drama, set in London, about two working-class boys who fall in love. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 239-6200.)

Blue Heart—The brilliant British playwright Caryl Churchill is known for taking the world apart and putting it back together in such odd and fantastic ways that it makes the audience wonder which is truly stranger—reality or her alternative. In the case of this set of short plays, however, you stop wondering early on. Once her devices for making the world strange are in place, not much is surprising, which is the biggest surprise of all for Churchill. Both plays are enjoyable nonetheless, and the cast is wonderful. (BAM's Majestic Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Closes Feb. 21.)

The Blue Room—Nicole Kidman is beautiful, leggy, and damn good at her job, and she and her excellent co-star, Iain Glen, have real chemistry, but it takes all of their charisma to give an iota of life to this show's cardboard characters and charmless script—an adaptation by David Hare of Arthur Schnitzler's Viennese sexual merry-go-round, "La Ronde." (Reviewed in our issue of 12/28/98 & 1/4/99.) (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

Captains Courageous: The Musical—Manhattan Theatre Club presents Treat Williams and Brandon Espinoza in a tuneful version of Kipling's novel. With music by Frederick Freyer and book and lyrics by Patrick Cook. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

A Couple of Blaguards—Shay Duffin and Mickey Kelly perform Frank and Malachy McCourt's two-man autobiographical show. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 799-4599.)

Death of a Salesman—From Chicago's Goodman Theatre, a fiftieth-anniversary staging of Arthur Miller's play. (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

ROBERT RISKO

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LE COLLEZIONI

Electra—David Leveaux's powerful production of Sophocles' tragedy, starring Zoë Wanamaker. The play's bewildering brutality comes through as clearly as yesterday's headlines. (12/28/98 & 1/4/99) (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

The Eros Trilogy—The theme of Nicky Silver's most recent New York production is love, in its strange and surprising varieties, and all three pieces quiver with emotional electricity and deep, unsettling intelligence. One solo work, performed by Zack Orth, is almost Dostoyevskian in its discomfiting obsessiveness. It is sandwiched between two pieces starring Betty Buckley; the first, another solo work, is extremely funny much of the time, and Buckley's vibrance makes it devastatingly poignant as well. In the other, she and her son (played by T. Scott Cunningham) read letters they've written to each other over two and half decades; the writing and the performances turn what could have been a static and predictable dramatic setup into a beautifully unfolding illustration of the sweet-and-sour mystery of life. Directed by Silver's longtime collaborator David Warren. (Vineyard Theatre, 108 E. 15th St. 353-3874.)

Far East—An American military officer (Michael Hayden) is caught in a triangle involving his commander's wife, in a drama by A. R. Gurney, set during the Korean War. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Flea Theatre—Performances of the company's revival of Mac Wellman's 1986 play, "Cleveland," run in repertory with its contemporary staging of "Benten Kozo," by Kawatake Mokuami. (41 White St. 226-0051.)

Footloose—A musical adaptation of the 1984 film, co-written by Dean Pitchford (who also wrote the screenplay) and Walter Bobbie. With music by Tom Snow and lyrics by Mr. Pitchford. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

Fosse—A tribute to the choreographer's work, created by Richard Maltby, Jr. (director), Ann Reinking (co-director/co-choreographer), and Chet Walker (choreography re-creator). (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

House/Lights—Gertrude Stein's libretto for the opera "Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights" and the 1964 cult film "Olga's House of Shame" are the inspirations for the Wooster Group's latest work. (Performing Garage, 33 Wooster St. 966-3651.)

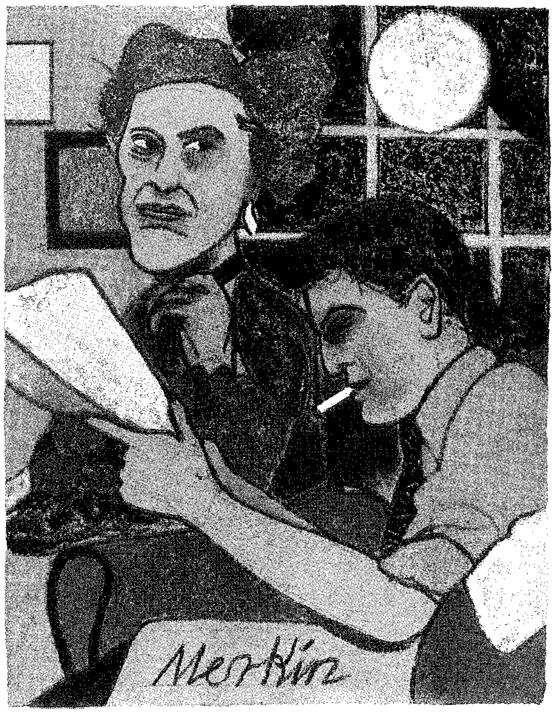
James Naughton: Street of Dreams—Between covers of romantic tunes by artists ranging from Billy Strayhorn to the King, Naughton inserts funny, standup-style anecdotes from his thirty-year stage career, and whether in monologue or in song he's a charmer. He may not have Bing Crosby's command (he's a little too earnest when he croons "I'm Hip"), but his voice is smoothly charged, and so is his band, which is led by the superb John Oddo on piano. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313.)

Killer Joe—In Tracy Letts's graphically violent dark comedy, an American family striving for a better life—in this case, a bunch of losers living in a trailer outside Dallas—hires a hit man to help things along. The terrific production is so vividly unselfconscious that you hardly feel assaulted at all. Wilson Milam is the director. (SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 239-6200.)

Little by Little—Liz Larsen, Christiane Noll, and Darrin Baker portray childhood friends who become involved in a love triangle as adults, in a new musical from the York Theatre Company. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 935-5820. Closes Feb. 21.)

The Misanthrope—Martin Crimp's new version of Molière's comedy, starring Uma Thurman and Roger Rees, is set in present-day London. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 239-6200. Closes March 7.)

The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told—Paul Rudnick's new version of a very old tale, starring Alan Tudyk and Jay Goede as Adam and Steve and Becky Ann Baker and Kathryn Meisle as Jane and Mable. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 420-8000.)



Judy Parfitt and Matthew Broderick, in "Night Must Fall," by Emlyn Williams.

RICHARD MERKIN

The Mystery of Irma Vep—It's not difficult to imagine what made this farce a hit back in 1984: the play's author and original star, the immensely gifted Charles Ludlam, who died in 1987 of complications due to AIDS. But drag has been out of the closet for a long time now; this is a relic of a more innocent time. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

Oh, Coward!—A revue of Noël Coward songs, presented by the Irish Repertory Theatre. (132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737. Closes March 14.)

Over the River and Through the Woods—In Joe DiPietro's new comedy, a young man planning his future clashes with his four Italian-American grandparents. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

Parade—This musical revisits the case of Leo Frank, a college-educated Northern Jew who in 1913 was accused of murdering a teenage girl in the Atlanta pencil factory that he managed, only to be taken from jail in 1915 by anti-Semitic vigilantes and lynched. It is generally believed that Frank was railroaded, and the show feels like a train hauling a heavy cargo of exposition uphill to a preset destination. (12/28/98 & 1/4/99) (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200. Closes Feb. 28.)

Paradise Hotel—A new mind bender from the director and writer Richard Foreman, about a group of travellers searching for sexual nirvana. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650.)

Side Man—Warren Leight's astute, elegiac play, expertly directed by Michael Mayer, is a young man's bittersweet homage to his crazy, warring parents and to the mysteries of the jazz life that divided them. (11/23/98) (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Stop Kiss—Diana Son's modern tragicomedy, about two heretofore heterosexual young women (Brooke Smith and Sandra Oh) falling in love in New York, is a small wonder. The fine production shifts back and forth seamlessly between scenes that lead up to the friends' first kiss and scenes that follow it, in the aftermath of a brutal, bias-inspired assault. It's a sweet dream and a nightmare at once, a juxtaposition that makes both sides of life more resonant. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400. Closes Feb. 21.)

This Is Our Youth—Kenneth Lonergan's highly praised comedy about postadolescent heartbreak has reopened at a new theatre. His characters are meant to be the by-products of a morally bankrupt culture; they have everything in life but a reason to be. Lonergan, whose script shows real theatrical promise, is good on surface behavior but not on subtext. Everything that is psychologically important happens offstage. (Douglas Fairbanks, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

Wit—In this first play by Margaret Edson, about the life and death (from ovarian cancer) of a John Donne scholar, Kathleen Chalfant gives an excruciating, powerful performance as Dr. Vivian Bearing, one of those larger-than-life professors who are terrifyingly smart, and proud of it. Dressed in a hospital gown and pushing an I.V. pole, Bearing plays games with words, which are giddily, awfully, hilarious (they are, in fact, the essence of wit); but word games will not save her, and she knows it. Right up to the last second, "Wit" has riches of acting, writing, and stagecraft that you revel in, even in the atmosphere of death, and it is directed with just the right touch by Derek Anson Jones. (1/18/99) (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown—Clark Gesner's 1967 musical based on the Charles Schulz comic strip, directed by Michael Mayer. (Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

LONG RUNS

ART: Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. . . . **THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200. (Closes March 14.) . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **CABARET:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **CHICAGO:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **COLLECTED STORIES:** Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200. (Closes Feb. 28.). . . **DE LA GUARDA:** Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY:** Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200. . . . **HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH:** Jane Street Theatre, Hotel Riverview Ballroom, 113 Jane St. 239-6200. . . . **I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200. . . . **JEKYLL & HYDE:** Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **LATE-NITE CATECHISM:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE LION KING:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **RAGTIME:** Ford Center for the Performing Arts, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **RENT:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000. . . . **THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL:** Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4100. . . . **SECRETS EVERY SMART TRAVELER SHOULD KNOW:** Ibis, 327 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **THE SOUND OF MUSIC:** Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **SYMPHONIE FANTASTIQUE:** HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 647-0202. . . . **TITANIC:** Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4100. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.

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DANCE

New York City Ballet—Final performances of the winter season. Feb. 17 at 8: "Ballo Della Regina," "Afternoon of a Faun," "Antique Epigraphs," and "Brandenburg." . . . ¶ Feb. 18-19 at 8: "Jewels." . . . ¶ Feb. 20 at 2: "Ballo Della Regina," "Ancient Airs and Dances," and "Concerti Armonici." . . . ¶ Feb. 20 at 8: "Ancient Airs and Dances," "Stabat Mater," and "The Four Seasons." . . . ¶ Feb. 21 at 3: "Jewels." . . . ¶ Feb. 23 at 8: "The Goldberg Variations" and "Brandenburg." . . . ¶ Feb. 24 at 8: "In G Major," "Opus 19/The Dreamer," and "The Four Seasons." . . . ¶ Feb. 25 at 8: "Fanfare," "Les Noces," and "The Concert." . . . ¶ Feb. 26 at 8: "2 & 3 Part Inventions," "Afternoon of a Faun," "Antique Epigraphs," and "In G Major." . . . ¶ Feb. 27 at 2: "2 & 3 Part Inventions," "Les Noces," and "The Four Seasons." . . . ¶ Feb. 27 at 8: "Fanfare," "Afternoon of a Faun," "Antique Epigraphs," and "Brandenburg." . . . ¶ Feb. 28 at 3: "Dances at a Gathering" and "The Concert." (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

Martha Graham Dance Company—The troupe ends its first extended New York season in five years. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Feb. 16-19 at 8, Feb. 20 at 2 and 8, and Feb. 21 at 2 and 7:30.)

Maria Benitez Teatro Flamenco—The ten-member New Mexico-based company presents contemporary interpretations of traditional Spanish dance. (Joyce Theatre. Feb. 23-26 and March 2 at 8, Feb. 27 at 2 and 8, and Feb. 28 at 2. Through March 7.)

Carnival—Dance Theatre Workshop's two-month-long series designed to give extended exposure to emerging companies. Feb. 16-17 and Feb. 25-26 at 8: **jeremy nelson and luis lara** in "Morphylactic." Through March 7. . . . ¶ Feb. 18-19 and Feb. 27 at 8 and Feb. 28 at 3: **pat hall & pam patrick** in "(under)-Cover Girls." . . . ¶ Feb. 20 at 8 and Feb. 21 at 3: **philip hamilton** in "Vocalscapes." . . . ¶ Feb. 23-24 at 8: **cydney wilkes** in "Premonitions of Latitude (Plot)." Through March 14. (219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. The festival continues through March 28.)

Ladies' night at Swine on Nine Saloon, a new theme bar in Hell's Kitchen.

DAVID MAZZUCCHELLI

"Please Don't Leave Me"—The Brazilian choreographic team of Andrea Lerner and Rosane Chamecki present their paean to romance and love, and the violent physical changes they bring on. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. Feb. 18-21 at 8:30.)

92nd Street Y Harkness Dance Center—The Uptown dance series opens with Maia Claire Garrison and M'Zawa Danz in "Thought Waves, Heat Waves, All Vibrations." With Keep Bangin', the percussion ensemble from "Bring in da Noise, Bring in da Funk." (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 415-5553. Feb. 25 and Feb. 27 at 8 and Feb. 28 at 5.)

Nancy Meehan Dance Company—Repertory works ("Bending the Mountain" and "Night Suspension") and an untitled première. (St Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Feb. 19-21 at 8:30.)

Global Exchange—The Danspace Project series matching American and international choreographers features New York's Hetty King in "Soft/A Trilogy" and the Swedish soloist Helena Franzen in "Single Neuron Recording." (Danspace Project, St Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Feb. 26-28 at 8:30.)

"Carne en Doce Escenábolos"—The Caracas-based company Neodanza presents an evening-length work whose depiction of Latin-American culture owes much to both Goya and the Surrealists. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 475-7710. Feb. 18-20 and Feb. 25-27 at 7:30 and Feb. 21 and Feb. 28 at 3 and 7:30.)

José Greco II Flamenco Dance Company—The scion of José Greco carries on the family business. (Whitman Theatre, Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts, Brooklyn College. 718-951-4500. Feb. 20 at 8.)

New York Express Roller Dance Show—The skate choreographer Steve Love and his six-member company of dancers on wheels. (Whitman Theatre. Feb. 21 at 2.)

Jody Oberfelder Dance Projects—The premières of "Scope" and "Re: Sound," the latter with the six dancers collaborating with the ten musicians of the Gamelan Son of Lion. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 334-7479. Feb. 25-28 at 8.)

Roots of Brazil—The New York-based company of uprooted Brazilians presents capoeira, samba, *xaxado*, and other traditional dances of their home country's northeast region. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400. Feb. 19 at 8.)

Odadaa!—Dancers and drummers from the Ga tribe of Ghana present "Tsimo" (which means "powerful" in Ga), a suite of new dances based on tribal traditions of heavy and continuous rhythmic accompaniment. (Symphony Space. Feb. 20 at 8.)

Rennie Harris Puremovement—The seven-member company in "P-Funk," "Students of the Asphalt Jungle," and other works that use hip-hop and club dance as a springboard for their choreography. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. Feb. 26 at 7, Feb. 27 at 2 and 7, and Feb. 28 at noon and 5.)

"The One Hundreds"—Twyla Tharp re-creates her 1969 work that called for a hundred participants performing the eleven-count phrases Tharp taught them in an afternoon rehearsal. (Hunter College, Park Ave. at 69th St. 650-3636. Feb. 27 at 7.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

Alanis Morissette—The moody Canadian vocalist. With the sleek modern rock of Garbage. (Nassau Coliseum. Feb. 18 at 8. . . . ¶ Continental Airlines Arena, the Meadowlands. Feb. 19 at 8. For both concerts, call 212-307-7171.)

Sugar Ray / Everlast—An evening of pretty-boy grunge and acoustic-guitar-driven hip-hop blues. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 307-7171. Feb. 19 at 7.)

Fred Hopkins Memorial—The recent death of bassist Hopkins, an inventive and passionate player who was a mainstay in cutting-edge bands of the past three decades, including Air and several David Murray ensembles, is a heavy blow to the jazz community. The World Saxophone Quartet, Ray Anderson's trombone quartet, drummer Andrew Cyrille, and others turn out to honor him. (Davis Hall, City College, Convent Ave. at 134th St. 650-7148. Feb. 19 at 7:30.)

Tibet House Benefit—Scheduled to appear are Philip Glass, R.E.M., Patti Smith, Shawn Colvin, Trey Anastasio (of Phish), and Cibo Matto. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Feb. 22 at 7:30.)

Jimmy Buffett—The man from Margaritaville, one of America's most popular touring acts, backed by his Coral Reefer Band. (Madison Square Garden. Feb. 22 at 8. . . . ¶ Nassau Coliseum. Feb. 24 at 8. . . . ¶ Continental Airlines Arena, the Meadowlands. Feb. 26 at 8. For all concerts, call 212-307-7171.)

Blondie—Judging from the band's rusty performance at the American Music Awards, this reunion won't be as good as the memories. Still, for anyone who wasn't at those early gigs at CBGB, here's your chance to get New Wave. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. Feb. 23 at 8.)

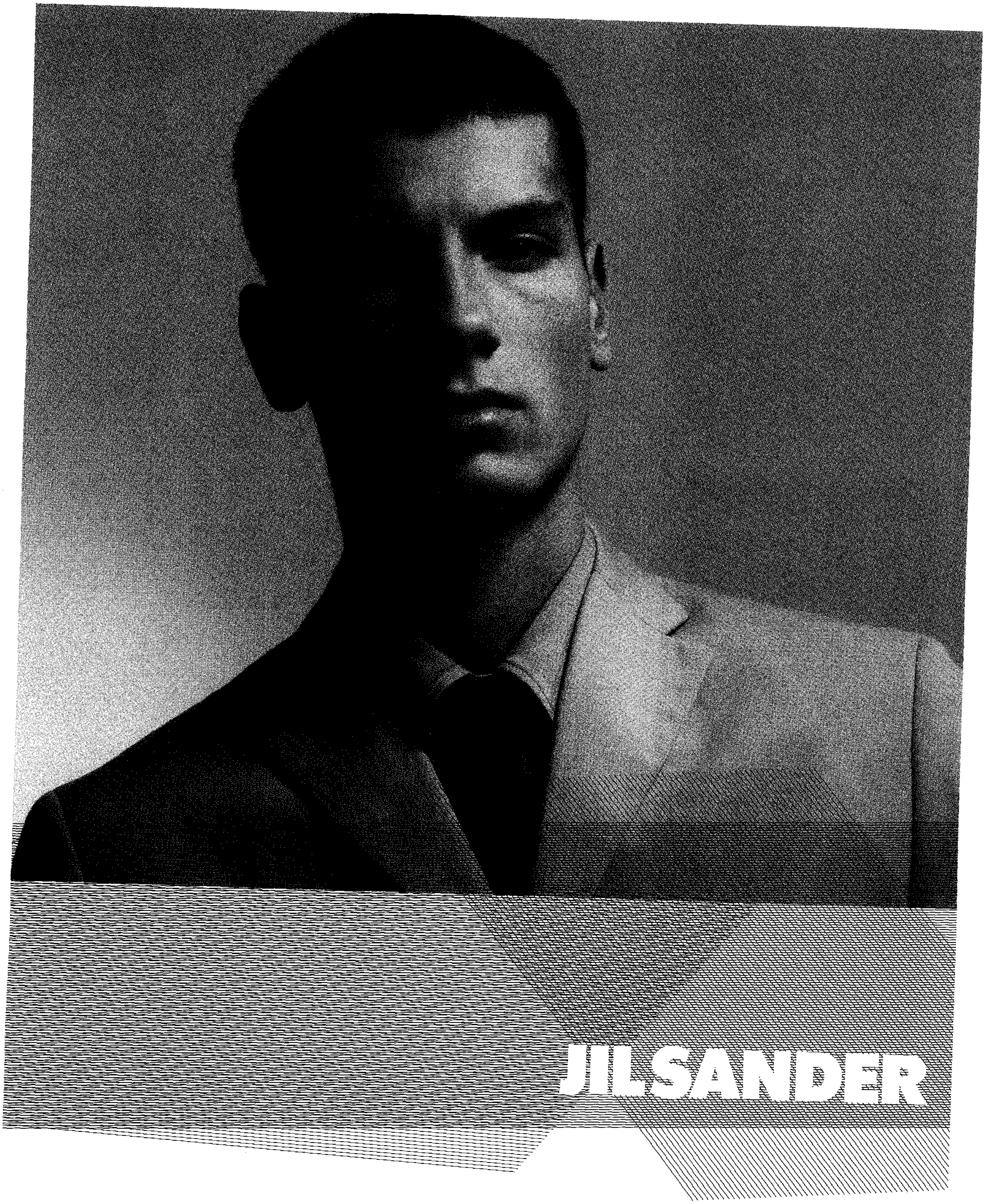
Jazz at Lincoln Center—The Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra has over the years played a great deal of challenging canonical material, but this program outshines all others. The early nineteen-forties work of Duke Ellington—and of his then new collaborator Billy Strayhorn—is Everest to a jazz big band. Giving the L.C.J.O. a leg up on their difficult task is the estimable pianist John Lewis, who declared his fealty to Ellington throughout his fifty years with his former ensemble, the Modern Jazz Quartet. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. Feb. 25 and Feb. 27 at 8.)

The Black Crowes—For a while they were a younger, feistier version of the Rolling Stones, but these days the Stones impersonate the Stones better than the Black Crowes do. Still, Chris Robinson's gnarled tenor and the band's razor-sharp rhythm section are forces to be reckoned with. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. Feb. 25 and Feb. 27-28 at 8.)

Sonic Youth—The only group on a major label interested in making an eleven-minute ode to Allen Ginsberg ("Hits of Sunshine"), this New York City quartet keeps on ticking. (Hammerstein Ballroom, Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. 564-4882. Feb. 27 at 8.)

The Offspring—They may be dumb, but they're not dweebs: these post-punk rockers whip up a mean mosh pit. With the extra-large funk collective Ozomatli. (Roseland. Feb. 27-28 at 8.)

"Jazz Cubano"—Trombonist Juan Pablo Torres leads a big band featuring pianist Bebo Valdés. (Town Hall. Feb. 27 at 8.)



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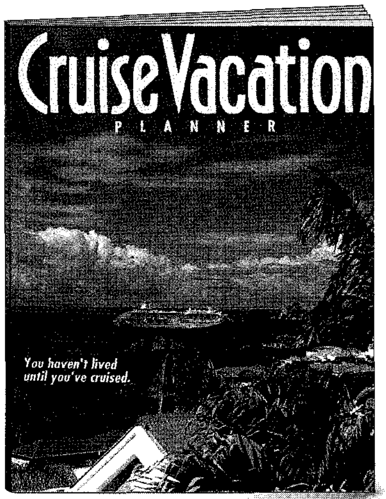
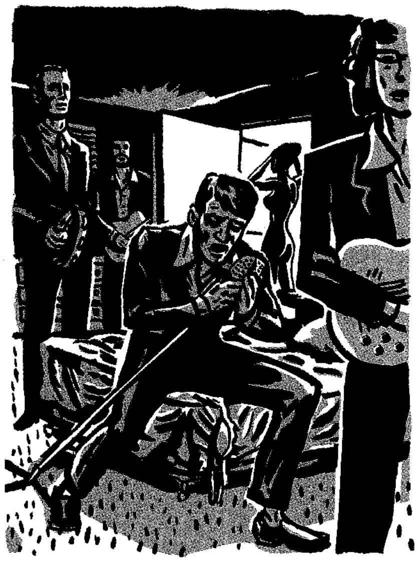


CLUBS

(A highly arbitrary listing. Musicians and nightclub proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Feb. 19: The guitar-and-vocal duo **Tuck & Patti.** Feb. 20: **Marshall Crenshaw,** the onetime great pretender of power pop whose most recent album, "The 9 Volt Years: Battery Powered Home Demos & Curios (1979-198?)," is an amusing but slightly sad offering that includes a scratchy, homespun version of his greatest hit, "Someday, Someway." Feb. 21: Country hipster **Joe Ely.** Feb. 22: **The Bacon Brothers,** featuring actor and guitarist Kevin Bacon. Feb. 26: The James Taylor-with-fangs folk of **Loudon Wainwright III.** Feb. 28: Bruce Springsteen colleague **Southside Johnny** in an acoustic show, with the infamous cranky rock god **Graham Parker.**

Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Feb. 18-20: The **Afghan Whigs,** the Cincinnati-based, white-boy funk collective, led by songwriter and vocalist Greg Dulli. Their latest release, "1965," continues to perfect the Whigs' careful distillation of gilded atmospherics and Isaac Hayes-era retro funk, a sound best exemplified by the group's excellent 1996 album, "Black Love." Feb. 23: **Chavez,** a kind of indie-rock supergroup, featuring former members of Live Skull and Bullet LaVolta. Feb. 27: Former Blasters guitarist **Dave Alvin** and **Robbie Fulks.** March 1: **Mudhoney,** the seminal Seattle outfit that gave the world the classic "Touch Me I'm Sick."



The Afghan Whigs, at the Bowery Ballroom.

Brownies, 169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—The precocious Staten Island duo **Professor and Maryann** (Feb. 18) balances the cerebral (courtesy of guitarist-songwriter Ken Rockwell) with dark good looks (from helium-throated singer Danielle Brancaccio).

Fez, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—Feb. 26: The downtown combo **Elysian Fields** plays what might best be described as erotic jazz. The **Mingus Big Band** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Feb. 26-27: Undergrad ska with **Reel Big Fish.** March 2: Legendary Jamaican dub master **Lee (Scratch) Perry,** with **Mad Professor.**

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Feb. 19: Free-jazz and downtown-rock drummer **William Hooker.** Feb. 27-28: The great Czech band **Plastic People of the Universe** makes a very rare appearance.

Manny's Car Wash, 1558 Third Ave., at 87th St. (369-2583)—Feb. 19: Guitar prodigy **Mike Welch.**

Maxwell's, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-0406)—The "suave and sybaritic" (by their own description) **Combustible Edison** (Feb. 20), whose music is a kitschy libation consisting of equal parts vibraphone, organ, bongos, surf guitar, and torchy vocals. Feb. 27: Mr. Woodstock, **Richie Havens.** March 2: **Mudhoney** (see the Bowery Ballroom).

Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Feb. 17: Crime novelist **Elmore Leonard** joins the **Stone Coyotes,** the hard-rocking family trio (husband, wife, son) from Greenfield, Massachusetts, which was the writer's inspiration for his latest book, "Be Cool." Feb. 19: Guitarist **Gary Lucas** leads his trio Gods and Monsters. Feb. 25: Another family of musicians, **The Nields** make clever songs full of sweet harmonizing which strive to make the leap from folk to rock. Feb. 26: Former Dream Syndicate front man **Steve Wynn.**

S.O.B.'s, 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—Feb. 20: Soca legend the **Mighty Sparrow.** Dining.

Swine on Nine Saloon, 693 Ninth Ave., at 48th St. (397-8356)—With the Disneyfication of Times Square at a fever pitch, it was only a matter of time until a cute and cuddly sensibility infected the surrounding streets of Hell's Kitchen. But that gritty neighborhood's sense of self (and sense of humor) may yet prevail. This new drinking establishment, which aspires to be the city's first theme dive bar, sports a giant bowtied-and-jacketed pig standing sentinel at the front door; the interior is a colorful display of painted porkers. Yet the touristy feel doesn't extend to the drinks—they're as cheap as a subway token, and the mostly male, mostly plaid-and-denim-clad patrons are as content as bird dogs in the brush. Tuesday is ladies' night, during which female patrons can spin a wheel for discounted beverages when they buy (or are bought) a drink. But women are always treated specially here; they get a pink souvenir piggy bank just for stopping by.

Tramps, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—Feb. 26-27: "Cosmic Cowboy" **Jerry Jeff Walker,** who wrote "Mr. Bojangles."

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Feb. 25-27: The **Lew Tabackin** quartet. It'll take a young dynamo like trumpeter **Nicholas Payton** to keep up with the voluble tenor saxophonist Tabackin. Dining.

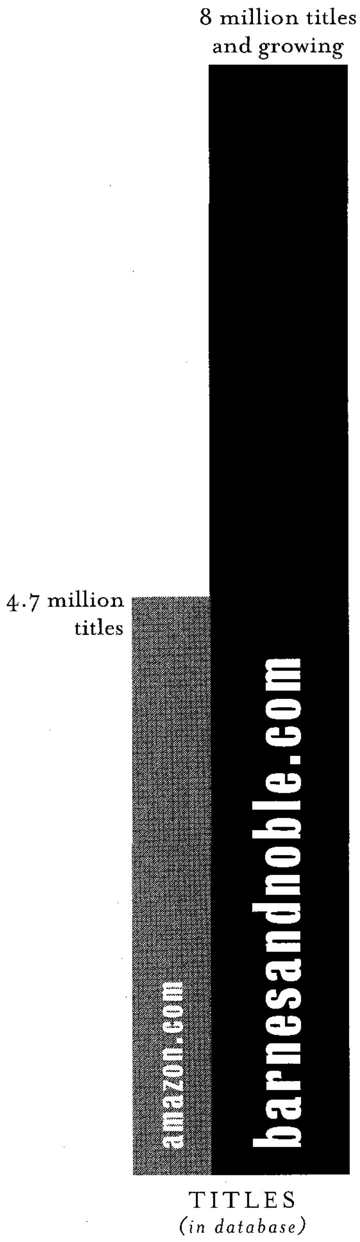
Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through Feb. 21: Vocalist **Tania Maria.** Feb. 23-28: New Orleans piano stylist **Dr. John.** Dining.

Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, through March 13, the amazing **Eartha Kitt.** . . . ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, pianist **Peter Mintun** is in attendance.

Cleopatra's Needle, 2485 Broadway, at 92nd St. (769-6969)—Feb. 17: With the torrential swing of bassist **Ben Allison** and drummer **Matt Wilson** behind him, the underrated mainstream pianist **Pete Malinverni** has the perfect setting for inspiration—if, that is, he's prepared to sweat.

Iridium, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through Feb. 21: The **Kenny Garrett** quartet. While the tenor still rules as the jazz saxophone of choice, the alto is currently finding more than its usual share of champions, chief among them Garrett. Despite a strong decade-plus résumé, including work with Art Blakey, Miles Davis, and Woody Shaw, Garrett has started to blossom as a distinctive player only in the past few years. His neo-modal bop approach isn't radically different from that of the other alto contenders (Greg Osby, Steve Wilson), but his technical fluency and expressive power are. He may not change the face of jazz, but he's certainly restoring some needed passion. Feb. 23-28: The **Bobby Hutcherson** quintet. It took

ERIK T. JOHNSON



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Hutcherson to translate the modernist grammar of sixties jazz for the vibraphone. At his best when he glides into the spare, mysterious ruminations perfected on classics like Eric Dolphy's "Out to Lunch," Hutcherson also loves to strut his piston-mallet technique on up-tempo chargers. He's joined here by saxophonist Kenny Garrett (see above). Mondays belong to electric-guitar innovator **LES PAUL.**

JAZZ STANDARD, 116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—Feb. 18-21: Drummer **CARL ALLEN** juices up a band from the first note; his quintet this time around includes the assured pianist **ERIC REED** and the talented young guitarist **MARK WHITFIELD.** Dining.

KNICKERBOCKER, 33 University Pl., at 9th St. (228-8490)—Feb. 17-20: Tapping into the wellspring of Tyner, Hancock, and Evans, pianist **JOANNE BRACKEEN** has fashioned her own engaging and personal sound. Everything she touches, from American songbook standards and Brazilian lilts to her own modernist pieces, rings with assuredness. Like an old married couple, Brackeen and her longtime colleague, the revered bassist **CECIL MC BEE,** seem to complete each other's musical sentences.

KNITTING FACTORY, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Feb. 17: Two new-jazz masters of the bull fiddle—**MARK DRESSER** and **MARK HELIAS.** Dresser may be the more expressively volatile of the two, but Helias has a luscious tone other players only dream about. Feb. 20: Clarinettist **DAVID KRAKAUER.** Feb. 26-28: The **MATT WILSON** quartet. Wilson vies with Leon Parker as one of the most musical young drummers on the scene today. Close attention should be paid to his bounding growth.

LENOX LOUNGE, 288 Lenox Ave., between 124th and 125th Sts. (427-0253)—**BOBBY WATSON,** here Feb. 19-20, is the Cannonball Adderley of our day: an exemplary alto player and a canny bandleader who revels in the pleasure of connecting with the crowd.

SWEET BASIL, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—Trumpeter **DAVE DOUGLAS** (through Feb. 21) is a virtuosic horn player who loves music—all music, it seems—and he's happy to let his myriad passions show directly in his work. He takes on free jazz, traditional jazz, Eastern European music, classical Indian idioms, electronic experimentation, and Burt Bacharach tunes (that's just the beginning) and makes it all work with an inclusive attitude backed up by solid and inspired musicianship. His ensemble for this engagement is the fierce, pianoless quartet he recently put together, which features the compelling saxophonist **CHRIS POTTER** and the slamming rhythm team of bassist **JAMES GENUS** and drummer **BEN PEROWSKI.** Dining.

VILLAGE VANGUARD, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Feb. 21: Name two jazz artists of the past four decades that bassist **BUSTER WILLIAMS** hasn't played with. Good luck. Vibraphonist **STEPHON HARRIS** and pianist **GERI ALLEN** are on hand to help generate sparks. Feb. 23-28: The **BARRY HARRIS** trio. Where most bop pianists approach their keyboard like Secretariat on a good day, Harris is a seducer, easing into his runs with a satin touch, always placing melody in front of virtuosity. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays.

ZINNO, 126 W. 13th St. (924-5182)—Feb. 23-27: Amiable, dependable, polished; pianist **JOHN BUNCH,** guitarist **BUCKY PIZZARELLI,** and bassist **JAY LEONHART** aren't in the business of ruffling feathers. What they do best is provide a broadloom of gently intoxicating swing. Dining.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—"Anselm Kiefer: Works on Paper 1969-1993" presents fifty-four drawings, watercolors, gouaches, and woodcuts acquired by the museum in 1995. Through March 21. . . . ¶ "Dosso Dossi, Court Painter in Renaissance Ferrara." Through March 28. . . . ¶ "Cubism and Fashion," at the Costume Institute. Through March 14. . . . ¶ "From Van Eyck to Bruegel: Early Netherlandish Painting in the Metropolitan Museum of Art." Through Feb. 21. . . . ¶ "Charles Burchfield from the Collection," a survey of the museum's holdings of this great, eccentric American painter (1893-1967). Through Feb. 28. . . . ¶ "Eighteenth-Century French Drawings in New York Collections." Through April 25. . . . ¶ "Jade of Ancient Costa Rica." Through Feb. 28. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—"Julia Margaret Cameron's Women," an exhibition of fifty-seven prints by the early photographer (1815-1879), whose idealized portraits of Victorian women (including Julia Jackson, the mother of Virginia Woolf, and Alice Liddell, the model for Lewis Carroll's Alice) often presented them as nymphs or goddesses. Through May 4. . . . ¶ "Sight Gags: Grotesque, Caricature, and Wit in Modern and Contemporary Drawing." Through May 4. . . . ¶ An installation of twenty-five samplers by Elaine Reichek, whose embroidered sayings have been culled from Virginia Woolf, Ad Reinhardt, Mary Queen of Scots, and other sources. Through March 30. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 6; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:30.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—"Picasso and the War Years: 1937-45" focusses on the paintings, sculptures, and works on paper made during the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War, including preparatory studies for "Guernica," as well as "The Charnel House" and "Night Fishing at Antibes." Through May 9. . . . ¶ "Jim Dine: Walking Memory, 1959-69." Through May 16. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—Ray Johnson (1927-95) was famous for being New York's most famous unfamous artist. He deliberately cultivated his role as an outsider, although he practically invented the Happening and correspondence art, among other things. His retrospective is a gas, more like raiding the closet of a highly imaginative pack rat than an art exhibit. His art was verbal, allusive, and whimsical: a pair of saddle oxfords (the right one painted with the word "John" and the left "Cage") is entitled "A Shoe." Among other treasures is a life mask of Candy Darling, which Johnson used to carry around the Village in a see-through bag—a one-man, walking, mini-Happening. Through March 21. . . . ¶ The Duane Hanson (1925-96) retrospective brings together a comprehensive selection of the artist's almost perversely realistic re-creations of middle-class Americans: life-size casts of construction workers, a tough-looking cop, a weary maid, a bored flea-market vender. Through Feb. 28. . . . ¶ An exhibition of fifty-two Brice Marden drawings. Through March 28. . . . ¶ "Pale Guide to Transparent Things," an exhibition of photographs by Seton Smith. Through April 4. . . . ¶ "Circular Breathing," a video installation by Gary Hill. Through March 21. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART, Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"Domestic Transformations: Working in Brooklyn" features paintings and sculptures by borough residents Ann Agee, Ron Baron, Jean Blackburn, and Andy Yoder. Through March 14. . . . ¶ "Lewis Wickes Hine: The Final Years" presents documentary work from the thirties, of such sites of immigrant activity as Ellis Island and the Lower East Side. The realist photographer (1874-1940) created this body of work hoping—in vain—to secure an assignment from the Farm Security Administration. Through Feb. 28. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

CHINA INSTITUTE, 125 E. 65th St. (744-8181)—"A Literati Life in the Twentieth Century" celebrates Wang Fangyu (1913-97), a Chinese scholar and artist who emigrated from the People's Republic of China and re-created in Manhattan the civilized life of the Ming intelligentsia. He infused modernist energy into the ancient art of calligraphy, developing what he called a "dancing" style, which vibrates electrically on both

TABLES FOR TWO

BRIDGE CAFE, 279 Water St., at Dover St. (227-3344)—This twenty-year-old American café is situated in a wood-frame building that has occupied this corner of Manhattan, on the brink of the East River, since 1794. That year, according to the current owners, a fellow named Newell Narme opened a shop there selling produce, wine, and bottled porter; over the following two hundred and five years, the structure has housed an almost continuous stream of brothels and saloons.

Today, it's a romantic spot, hidden in the shadow of the Brooklyn Bridge. You can sense the building's history as you step from the Belgian-block street into the yellow-wainscotted dining room, with its simple maroon-cloth-covered tables and ornate, pressed-tin ceiling. The mahogany bar, which is lined by mirrors that shed their silver backing long ago, stocks some forty single-malt scotches (but only American wines), as well as copies of *The New York Chronicle,* a quarterly published by an amateur historian named Richard McDermott, who is also one of the restaurant's regulars.

The best way to begin a meal is with the grilled-shrimp salad. It's loaded with bits of grapefruit, huckleberries, and pineapple—subtle reminders of how full of unexpected sweetness life can be. The rich pumpkin ravioli, laced with citrus butter and crunchy toasted almonds, produces the same heady effect. Grilled buffalo steak, an adventurous follow-up, is savory and surprisingly tender. By the time the first light forkful of Key-lime pie crosses your lips, you'll be glad that history so often repeats itself. (Open weekdays for lunch and dinner, Saturdays for dinner only, and Sundays for brunch and dinner. Entrées $12-$20.)

scroll and page. The exhibit includes the exquisite objects—rocks, seals, jars, and the paraphernalia of the calligrapher's art—that he used to adorn his study, as well as works by the enigmatic seventeenth-century artist Bada Shanren, whom Wang Fangyu rescued from oblivion. Through June 20. (Open Mondays through Saturdays, 10 to 5, and Tuesday and Thursday evenings until 8; Sundays, 1 to 5.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)

Richard Stankiewicz (1922-83)—Three important sculptures and a large group of ink drawings, from the early sixties. Stankiewicz made the drawings by pouring and dripping ink onto Japanese tissue, occasionally helping it along with a brush. The monumental images that resulted are at once vigorous and elegantly understated—among the first American works to merit the now all-too-common accolade "Zen-like." The sculptures, on the other hand, are witty junk-metal assemblages that promiscuously blend the graceful and the ugly. Stankiewicz was never as well known as Jean Tinguely, but these pieces predate those of the Frenchman by several years. Through March 13. (Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. 752-1223.)

"Figure and Fantasy"—An impressive group of French landscapes, portraits, and genre paintings, from 1650 to 1800. Fragonard and Boucher are represented by major paintings, the former by an allegorical portrait of an actress as Venus, the latter by a ten-foot-tall canvas, "The Fisherman and the Bird Catcher." But the masterpiece here is the magnificent "Penitent Magdalene," by Georges de la Tour, a haunting image of the figure contemplating a skull by candlelight, her face obscured by a mass of falling hair. Sebastien Bourdon's portrait of the English diarist John Evelyn is richly painted and seems to peer deep into the sitter's soul. There is much of interest even among the second-rate work, such as "The First Love Letter," a sugary mother-and-daughter genre scene by Marguerite Gérard. It's little more than competent, but it's fascinating to see a painting by a woman artist that was exhibited at the Salon of 1814. Through March 6. (Berry-Hill, 11 E. 70th St. 744-2300.)

Short List—**ERIC BLUM** and **JEREMY KIDD,** Littlejohn, 41 E. 57th St. 980-2323. Both shows through March 6. . . . **ANITA HUFFINGTON,** O'Hara, 41 E. 57th St. 355-3330. Through March 13. . . . **LEE KRASNER,** Robert Miller, 41 E. 57th St. 980-5454. Through March 6. . . . **ELIZABETH MURRAY,** Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 421-3292. Through March 13. . . . **ELIZABETH NEWMAN,** Galerie Lelong, 20 W. 57th St. 315-0470. Through Feb. 27. . . . **GIOVANNI BATTISTA PIRANESI,** Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7288. Open Wednesdays through Saturdays, 1 to 5; through March 20. . . . **AD REINHARDT** and **ROBERT MOTHERWELL,** Marlborough, 40 W. 57th St. 541-4900. Both shows through March 13. . . . **ANN SPERRY,** Kraushaar, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 307-5730. Through March 13. . . . **NIKOLAI EFIMOVICH TIMKOV,** Spanierman, 45 E. 58th St. 832-0208. Through April 3. . . . **TOM UTTECH,** Schmidt Bingham, 41 E. 57th St. 888-1122. Through Feb. 27. . . . **MELISSA WEINMAN,** Tatistcheff, 50 W. 57th St. 664-0907. Through March 3. . . . **DAVID WOJNAROWICZ,** Baumgold, 128 E. 72nd St. 861-7338. Through March 6.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Christopher Chiappa—Sight gags, including a concrete motorcycle helmet, a coffin entirely covered in Band-Aids (eight thousand of them), a notarized restraining order prohibiting the artist from having any contact with himself, and photographs documenting other, equally frivolous activities (involving axes, neon, and the artist's very game parents). Whether you love or loathe the kind of seventies performance art that Chiappa is

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spoofing—think Christopher Burden and Bruce Nauman—it's hard to walk through the show without chuckling. Through Feb. 27. (Fredericks, 504 W. 22nd St. 633-6555.)

Nina Levy—Seductively playful photographs by a sculptor who casts and enlarges her own body parts, and then poses with them. Shot against a velvety black background, the resulting images are quite formal, but also enchantingly silly. They represent the sort of narcissistic calisthenics that we do in our heads, as we inventory and assess our physical selves. Sometimes Levy wears a version of her own head massively enlarged, its features locked in an uncomfortable social grin. In other pictures, she sports an alien back, or foot, or tongue. The exhibit also includes a sculptural assemblage, "Couple," in which Levy turns her dry wit to more sentimental purposes. Through March 6. (I-20 Gallery, 529 W. 20th St. 645-1100.)

Albert Oehlen—Large, sloppily exuberant paintings by a German artist who calls this show "refuse, light, and a joke invented in drunkenness." In canvases that glow with fluorescent greens, oranges, and yellows, Oehlen mixes genres, mediums, and imagery as wantonly as David Salle. Blurts of spray paint drift over an inkjet print of a howling coyote; an enormous ear emerges from a warren of architectural patterns. Unlike Salle's work, though, these paintings aren't calculated. Instead they're helplessly, agreeably cacophonous. Through Feb. 27. (Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 206-9100.)

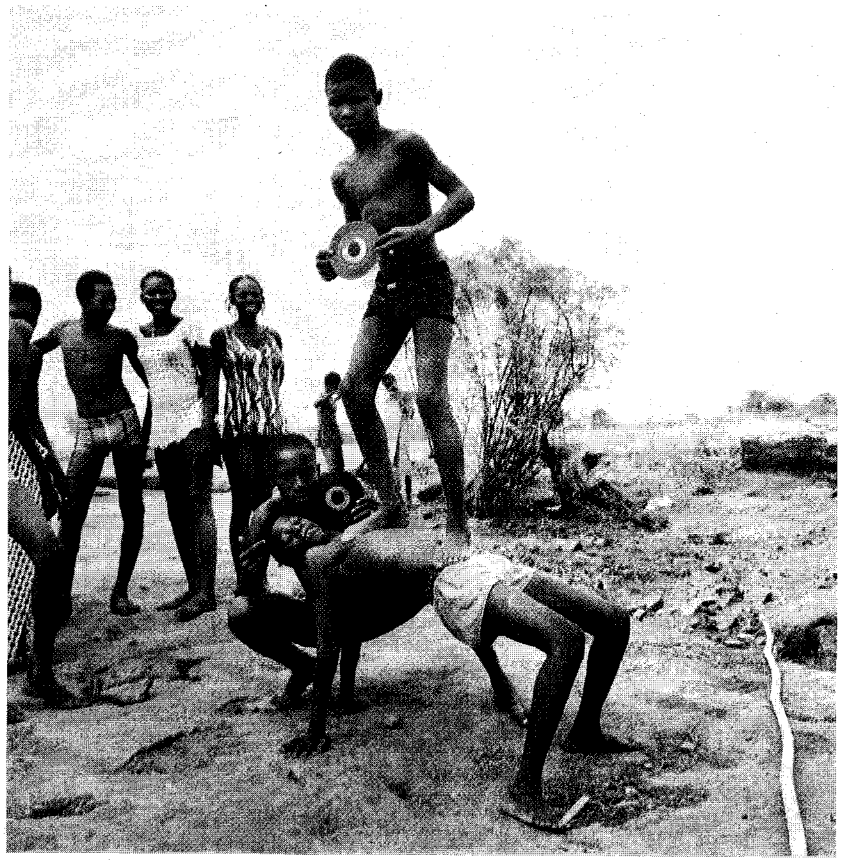
Stanley Whitney / Scott Brodie—A neat (maybe too neat) pairing of artists with a fondness for orderly composition. Whitney paints a kind of bookshelf abstraction: rectangular scribbles of color arranged in uneven horizontal rows. They have a comforting, upbeat vitality—like a toddler's memory of the parental library. Brodie's pictures—painted in oleaginous, high-key colors—represent actual books, stacked in artfully irregular vertical piles. The work of both artists is appealing, but it's not clear that much is at stake here. Through Feb. 27. (Maynes, 529 W. 20th St. 741-3318.)

Group Show—February is drawings month in Chelsea, with ambitious roundups at Greene Naftali, Metro Pictures, and Barbara Gladstone. The best of the lot is this small show, featuring a triumvirate of cartoon artists which spans three generations. The youngest of the three is Barry McGee, a San Francisco-based artist who sometimes goes by the graffiti tag Twist. He fills a wall with framed variations of his trademark image: a spudhead with slicked-back hair and a dazed expression, eyes rolled back as though he were fainting from lack of oxygen. It's easy to guess why he might, given that his neighbors here are R. Crumb and Philip Guston, who manipulate a similar set of cartoon conventions with far greater versatility. But their proximity is encouraging rather than annihilating, as if they were nudging McGee cheerfully back to the drawing board. Through March 6. (Morris, 465 W. 23rd St. 727-2752.)

Short List—**JEAN-MARC BUSTAMANTE,** Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 243-0200. Through March 20. . . . **BART DOMBURG,** Gasser & Grunert, 524 W. 19th St. 807-9494. Through March 20. . . . **ALEXANDER GORLIZKI,** DeChiara Stewart, 521 W. 26th St. 967-6007. Through March 20. . . . **MELISSA GWYN,** Feigen, 535 W. 20th St. 929-0500. Through Feb. 27. . . . **KAREN KILIMNIK,** 303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 255-1121. Through March 20. . . . **ANTONIO PETRACCA,** Foster, 529 W. 20th St. 966-9024. Through March 20. . . . **JUDY PFAFF,** McCready, 425 W. 13th St. 243-0439. Through Feb. 27. . . . **ROB PRUITT,** Gavin Brown's Enterprise, 436 W. 15th St. 627-5258. Through Feb. 27. . . . **SONITA SINGWI,** Liebman Magnan, 552 W. 24th St. 255-3225. Through April 3. . . . **PAUL THEK,** Alexander and Bonin, 132 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 367-7474. Through March 13. . . . **SARAH VANDERLIP,** XL, 504 W. 22nd St. 462-4111. Through March 13.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Ben Katchor—Original drawings from the cartoonist and author's most recent book, "The Jew of New York," accompanied by vitrines full of wry artifacts. These include battered top hats, pickled herring, and a "clod of earth from the Garden of Eden," allegedly collected in 1856. As an exhibit, it's pretty modest. Katchor's pages, on the other hand, are marvels of draftsmanship and humor. Like a cross between Roz Chast and Caleb Carr, he envisions a beguilingly strange old New York, populated by clunky middle-aged wanderers. Through Feb. 28. (Bronfman Center, 7 E. 10th St. 998-4114. Open Mondays through Thursdays, 8 to 10; Fridays, 8 to 4.)



"Picnic at Chaussée" (1972), by Malick Sidibé, at Deitch Projects.

Short List—**BARBARA BLOOM,** Blum, 99 Wooster St. 343-0441. Through April 30. . . . **ANSELME BOIX-VIVES,** Ross, 568 Broadway. 343-2161. Through Feb. 27. . . . **ROY DOWELL,** Marcus, 578 Broadway. 226-3200. Through March 13. . . . **SUZAN FRECON,** Markey, 55 Vandam St. 627-4446. Through March 13. . . . **GEOFFREY HENDRICKS,** Harvey, 537 Broadway. 925-7651. Through Feb. 27. . . . **LISA HOKE,** Holly Solomon, 172 Mercer St. 941-5777. Through Feb. 27. . . . **JILL LEVINE,** P.P.O.W, 476 Broome St. 941-8642. Through March 13. . . . **DAVID WOJNAROWICZ,** Gracie Mansion Gallery, 54 St. Marks Pl. 505-7055. Closed Tuesdays, opens at noon; through Feb. 27.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Christie's East—Feb. 17: Maritime art and collectibles, including numerous items from an annotated scrapbook detailing the Titanic rescue efforts. . . . ¶ Feb. 23: Twentieth-century art. (219 E. 67th St. 606-0430.)

Sotheby's—Feb. 17: Impressionist, post-Impressionist, modern, and contemporary art. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

Phillips—Feb. 23: English and Continental furniture, decorative art, and paintings. . . . ¶ Feb. 27: A wine auction, including a group of century-old vintages from Ukraine, as well as a jeroboam of Mumm Cordon Rouge Champagne, in a highly embellished bottle, signed by all the members of the 1988 Los Angeles Dodgers; on the same day, a sale of Lalique glass. (406 E. 79th St. 570-4830.)

Doyle—Furniture, decorative art, and paintings. (175 E. 87th St. 427-2730. Feb. 24.)

Swann—Printed and manuscript African-Americana. (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710. Feb. 25.)

The Art Show—A gathering of dealers who belong to the Art Dealers Association of America. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. Feb. 18-22. For information, call 766-9200.)

Armory Show 1999—Seventy-five prominent international galleries gather to show work by living artists from all over the world. (69th Regiment Armory, Lexington Ave. at 25th St. Feb. 18-22. For information, call 343-7324.)

Gramercy Garden Antiques Show—Everything from flowerpots to gazebos, for those itchy green thumbs. (69th Regiment Armory, Lexington Ave. at 25th St. Feb. 26-28. For information, call 255-0020.)

Celebrity (Wrist) Watching—Antiquorum Auctioneers and Tourneau present a benefit auction of eighty-seven timepieces of the rich and famous—Liz's Chopard, Oprah's Breguet, Leonardo's Cartier, and so on. (Tourneau TimeMachine, Madison Ave. at 57th St. Feb. 24. For information, call 750-1103.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

Stephane Couturier / "Visage"—Large-scale Cibachrome prints of construction sites in Paris, Dresden, and Berlin. / Fifteen vintage portraits by, among others, Julia Margaret Cameron, Walker Evans, and Berenice Abbott. Both shows through March 27. (Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 397-3930.)

"America and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1968"—A group show of well-known and obscure photographs, including images by Ben Fernandez, Bruce Davidson, Eve Arnold, and Danny Lyon. Through March 19. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. Please call for exhibition hours.)

"Inside/Outside"—Works from *Blind Spot* magazine's latest issue, by, among others, Jeff Brouws, Anna Bokstrom, Richard Misrach,

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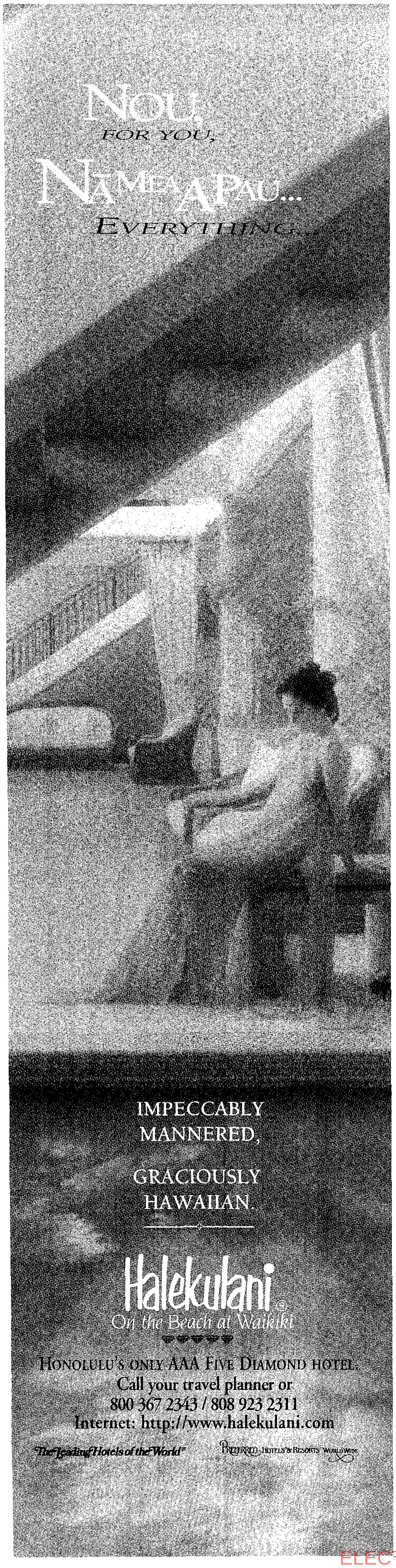

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Tokihiro Sato, and John Waters. Through March 27. (Mann, at its new location, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 25th St. 989-7600.)

International Center of Photography—"Bruce Davidson: The Brooklyn Gang, 1959." Through March 7. . . . ¶ "Intimate City: The Photographs of Thomas Roma." Through March 7. (1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5; Fridays, 10 to 8; and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6.)

International Center of Photography Midtown—"To the Rescue, Eight Artists in an Archive." Through May 16. (Sixth Ave. at 43rd St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5; Fridays, 10 to 8; and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6.)

Short List—**BRUCE BARNBAUM,** Witkin, 415 West Broadway. 925-5510. Through Feb. 20. . . . **BERND AND HILLA BECHER,** Sonnabend, 420 West Broadway. 966-6160. Through March 27. . . . **KEITH CARTER,** Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010. Through March 13. . . . **JED DEVINE,** Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 517-3766. Through March 27. . . . **WILLIAM EGGLESTON,** Cheim & Read, 521 W. 23rd St. 242-7727. Through Feb. 27. . . . **PETER FISCHLI AND DAVID WEISS,** Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 243-0200. Through March 20. . . . **LEE FRIEDLANDER,** Borden, 560 Broadway. 431-0166. Through March 20. . . . **SY KATTELSON,** Gallery 292, at 120 Wooster St. 431-0292. Through March 13. . . . **BARBARA MORGAN** and **BRETT WESTON,** Danziger, 851 Madison Ave., at 70th St. 734-5300. Open Sundays, noon to 5; both shows through March 27. . . . **LILIANA PORTER,** Nosei, 530 W. 22nd St. 741-8695. Through March 18. . . . **AARON ROSE,** Kasmin, 74 Grand St. 219-3219. Through March 20. . . . **MALICK SIDIBÉ,** Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. 343-7300. Through March 6. . . . **VICTOR SCHRAGER,** Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 750-7070. Through March 6. . . . **JAN STALLER,** Saul, 560 Broadway. 431-0747. Through Feb. 27. . . . **FRANK YAMRUS,** Morthland, 225 Tenth Ave., at 23rd St. 242-7767. Through March 6.

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Brooklyn Museum of Art.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

(The box-office number for Alice Tully Hall is 875-5050; for Avery Fisher Hall, 875-5030; for Carnegie Hall and Weill Recital Hall, 247-7800; for Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St., 501-3330; and for the 92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St., 996-1100.)

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera—Schoenberg's **MOSES UND ARON,** with Philip Langridge and John Tomlinson in the title roles; conducted by James Levine. (Feb. 17, Feb. 23, and Feb. 26 at 8 and Feb. 20 at 1:30.) . . . **IL TROVATORE,** with Michele Crider, Larissa Diadkova, Richard Margison, and Genaro Sulvarán; Jun Märkl. (Feb. 18 at 8.) . . . With Carolyn James, Elena Zaremba, Mr. Margison, and Alexandru Agache; Mr. Märkl. (Feb. 24 at 7:30 and Feb. 27 at 8.) . . . **ELEKTRA,** with Gabriele Schnaut, Deborah Voigt, Hanna Schwarz, Kenneth Riegel, and Monte Pederson; Mr. Levine. (Feb. 19 at 8, Feb. 22 at 7:30, and Feb. 27 at 2.) . . . **LA BOHÈME,** with Cristina Gallardo-Domas, Emily Pulley, Tito Beltrán, and Gino Quilico; Marco Armiliato. (Feb. 20 at 8.) . . . With Richard Leech instead of Mr. Beltrán. (Feb. 25 at 8.) . . . With Hei-Kyung Hong, Ainhoa Arteta, Luis Lima, and Kim Josephson; Mr. Armiliato. (March 2 at 8.) . . . **KHOVANSHCHINA,** by Mussorgsky, with Dolora Zajick, Clifton Forbis, Vladimir Bogachov, Nikolai Putilin, Paata Burchuladze, and Roberto Scandiuzzi; Valery Gergiev. (March 1 at 7:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

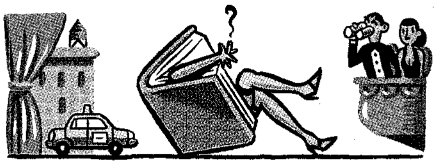
ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic—At Avery Fisher Hall, Kurt Masur conducting. Feb. 18-20 at 8 and Feb. 23 at 7:30: Menotti's rarely performed

BOOK CURRENTS

Giving Regards

THE twentieth-century Broadway musical has been New York City's own P.R. department, extolling Manhattan in lyric after lyric and receiving top billing in the city's intoxicating mythology. Myrna Katz Frommer and Harvey Frommer re-create the atmosphere of Broadway's heyday in **IT HAPPENED ON BROADWAY: AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE GREAT WHITE WAY** (Harcourt Brace). They have interviewed everyone from stars to writers to restaurateurs to David Merrick's press agents, who, anticipating bad reviews for "Subways Are for Sleeping," trawled the Manhattan phone book to get favorable review quotes from people who had the same names as the newspaper critics.



MICHAEL SLOAN

Mark Steyn's witty, anecdote-stuffed history of the past seventy years in musicals, **BROADWAY BABIES SAY GOODNIGHT: MUSICALS THEN AND NOW** (coming in May from Routledge), concludes that the genre is dying, caught between its need to attract wider audiences and its nostalgia for a vanished golden age. In **COMING UP ROSES: THE BROADWAY MUSICAL IN THE 1950S** (Oxford), Ethan Mordden describes how shows that combined convincing drama with their musical numbers came to replace the sometimes creaky star vehicles of the preceeding decades (once described by Oscar Levant as "a series of catastrophes ending in a floor show"). D. A. Miller's **PLACE FOR US** (Harvard) also concentrates on the fifties, exploring the ways that this mainstream cultural medium managed to provide a secret language of emotion for a growing underground of gay men.

Fresh nostalgia still produces great musicals, as evinced by the success of Broadway revivals like "Anything Goes," whose poster image of a flirtatious woman in a loose sailor top caught the insouciant thirties mood precisely. **THE THEATER POSTERS OF JAMES McMULLAN** (Penguin Studio) features this piece of art and thirty-five others, along with preliminary sketches and rejected versions. The artist's descriptions of the sometimes fraught process by which the final posters were created leads one to the happy conclusion that the Broadway spat, at least, is still thriving.

Books.
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Cutting-edge insights on what there is to see and do in Manhattan make this guide an über-hip look at a city with more hot spots than the sun. It offers a comprehensive look at what's happening in culture and entertainment—from cabaret to comedy, from rock to opera. (Penguin Trade)

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Do New York right, whether you are looking for the best deals on Broadway shows, the best places to please your palate, or just somewhere affordable and agreeable to lay your head. Its one-of-a-kind rating system and handy charts are tailored to provide insider advice, addressing the needs of everyone from families to business travelers. (Macmillan Travel)

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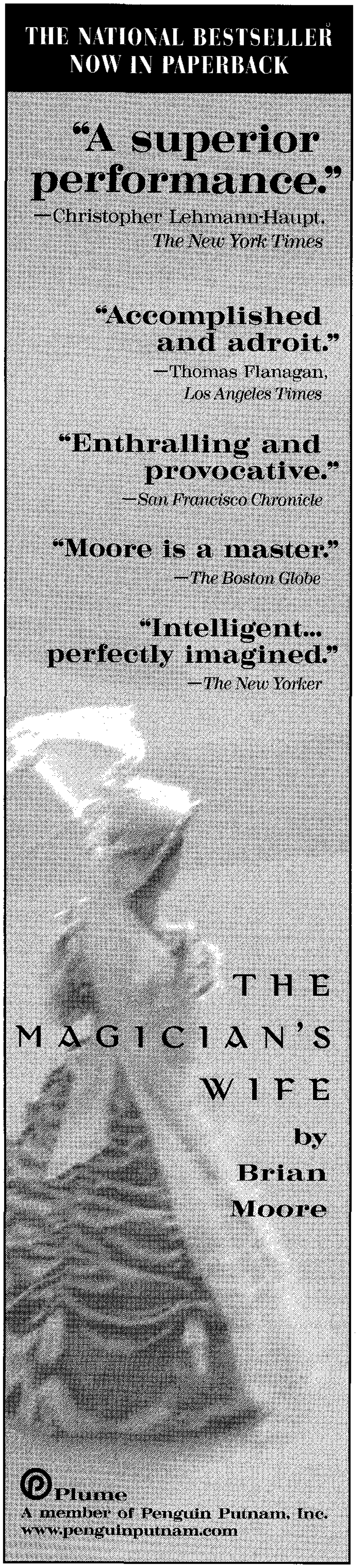
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THE MAGICIAN'S WIFE
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Violin Concerto (featuring Glenn Dicterow, the orchestra's concertmaster), in addition to Mahler's "Das Lied von der Erde," with mezzo-soprano Jennifer Larmore and tenor Richard Leech. . . . ¶ Feb. 25-27 at 8 and March 2 at 7:30: Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4 (with Hélène Grimaud) and Liszt's "Dante" Symphony (in which the American Boychoir does its bit in the Magnificat of the finale). (875-5030.)

Brooklyn Philharmonic—Robert Spano conducts Shostakovich's Symphony No. 7. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Feb. 19-20 at 8.)

Netherlands Wind Ensemble—Thierry Fischer conducts Purcell's "Music for the Funeral of Queen Mary," in addition to the United States premières of pieces by Cornelis de Bondt, Michael Nyman, and Louis Andriessen. (Alice Tully Hall. Feb. 20 at 8.)

Collegiate Chorale—Robert Bass directs Poulenc's Gloria and Duruflé's Requiem. (Church of the Heavenly Rest, Fifth Ave. at 90th St. Feb. 20 at 8. For information about tickets, call 664-1390.)

Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra—The period-instrument band, conducted by Ton Koopman, plays a suite from Rameau's "Dardanus" and Mozart's Symphony No. 29, as well as Boccherini's G-Major Cello Concerto and various movements by Bach. The soloist in the Bach and Boccherini, Yo-Yo Ma, is a surprising choice. Not an adherent of the historical-performance movement, he has recently been flirting with an eighteenth-century-style cello (as on his new, intermittently successful "Simply Baroque," on Sony Classical). Though it may well prove a momentary distraction for him, any demonstration of interest in historically informed performance on the part of an important mainstream soloist should be encouraged. (Avery Fisher Hall. Feb. 21 at 3.)

Orpheus Chamber Orchestra—Feb. 21 at 3: The conductorless ensemble performs Turina's "La Oración del Torero," guitar concertos by Vivaldi and Mauro Giuliani (with Pepe Romero), and Rudolf Barshai's orchestral expansion of Shostakovich's String Quartet No. 8. (Riverside Church, Riverside Dr. at 120th St. For information about tickets, call 896-1704.) . . . ¶ Feb. 27 at 8: The première of Peter Lieberson's Horn Concerto (featuring William Purvis), in addition to Boccherini's Symphony in B-Flat Major, Martinů's Serenade for Chamber Orchestra, and Mozart's B-Flat-Major Piano Concerto (K. 595, with Andreas Haefliger). (Carnegie Hall.)

Saint Louis Symphony—At Carnegie Hall, Hans Vonk conducting. Feb. 23 at 8: Peter Schat's "Arch Music for St. Louis," Sibelius's Violin Concerto (featuring Christian Tetzlaff), and Beethoven's Symphony No. 7. . . . ¶ Feb. 24 at 8: Messiaen's "Oiseaux Exotiques" and "Turangalîla-symphonie," with Garrick Ohlsson as the featured pianist.

William Appling Singers—Mr. Appling directs nineteenth-century American hymns and spirituals. (Christ and St. Stephen's Church, 120 W. 69th St. Feb. 26 at 8. For information about tickets, call 969-0783.)

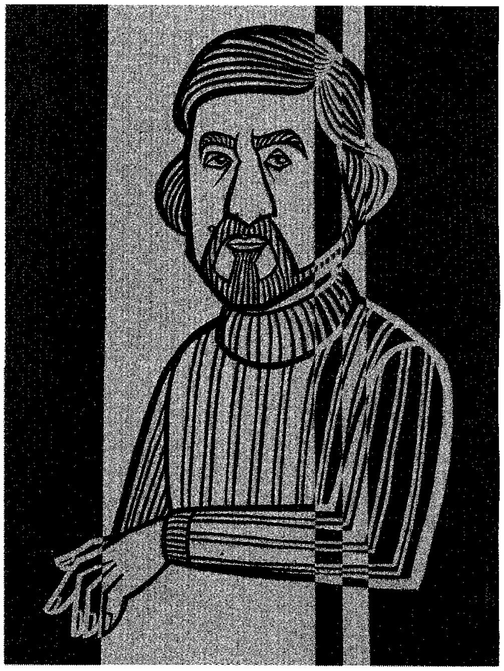
Les Arts Florissants—William Christie directs Purcell's odes for St. Cecilia's Day (1692) and for the birthday of Queen Mary (1691). (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Feb. 27 at 7:30 and Feb. 28 at 3.)

Cerddorion Vocal Ensemble—Susanne Peck directs Schubert's G-Major Mass and Mozart's F-Major Missa Brevis. (St. Michael's Episcopal Church, Amsterdam Ave. at 99th St. Feb. 28 at 7:30. For information about tickets, call 774-4105.)

RECITALS

St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble—Feb. 17 at 7: Works by Tania Gabrielle French, Inessa Zaretzky, and (with tenor Robert White) Eric Ewazen. (Dia Center for the Arts, 548 W. 22nd St. For information about tickets, call 594-6100, ext. 114.) . . . ¶ Feb. 23 at 8: Cantor Fredda Rakusin Mendelson (a mezzo-soprano) assists the group in works by such Jewish composers as Paul Schoenfield and Paul Ben-Haim. (92nd Street Y.)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center—Feb. 17 at 8: Presenting the Borromeo String Quartet in quartets by Prokofiev (his First), Thomas Adès (his "Arcadiana"), and Dvořák (his Eleventh). . . . ¶ Feb. 21 at 5 and Feb. 23 at 7:30: Members of the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio and the Orion String Quartet team up to perform an all-Beethoven concert comprising his Piano Quartet in E-Flat Major (Op. 16), F-Major String Quartet (Op. 59, No. 1), and Piano Trio in B-Flat Major (Op. 97, the "Archduke"). . . . ¶ Feb. 28 at 5: Violinist Midori, violist Nobuko Imai, and cellist Peter Riley play Schubert's String Trio in B-Flat Major, and Robert McDonald completes the ensemble for piano quartets by Brahms (in C Minor) and Dvořák (in E-Flat Major, Op. 87). . . . ¶ March 2 at 8: Trio sonatas by Corelli, Couperin ("L'Apothéose de Corelli"), Purcell, and Bach. (Alice Tully Hall.)


Composer Maki Ishii, whose work is the centerpiece this year of Music from Japan.

HIROSHI TANABE

Bargemusic—Feb. 18 at 7:30 and Feb. 21 at 4: The Brentano String Quartet plays four fantasies by Purcell, in addition to quartets by Schoenberg (his Third) and Beethoven (in E Minor, Op. 59, No. 2). . . . ¶ Feb. 25 at 7:30 and Feb. 28 at 2: Fred Sherry plays the Prelude from Bach's Cello Suite No. 5 and is joined by violinist Ani Kavafian and violist Paul Neubauer for string trios by Schnittke and Beethoven. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061.)

More Rorem—Ned Rorem reached his seventy-fifth birthday in October, but the celebration goes on and on. This latest salute, hosted by the composer himself, involves soprano Angelina Réaux, tenor Jerry Hadley, and numerous instrumentalists. (92nd Street Y. Feb. 18 at 8.)

"Kindertotenlieder"—Mahler's song cycle, performed by soprano Rebecca Blankenship and pianist Paul Suits in a staged production. (John Jay Theatre, Tenth Ave. at 58th St. Feb. 18-20 at 8. For information about tickets, call 721-6500.)

Karita Mattila—The Finnish soprano, assisted by pianist Ilmo Ranta, performs songs by Schubert, Mahler, Kaipainen, and others. (Carnegie Hall. Feb. 19 at 7:30.)

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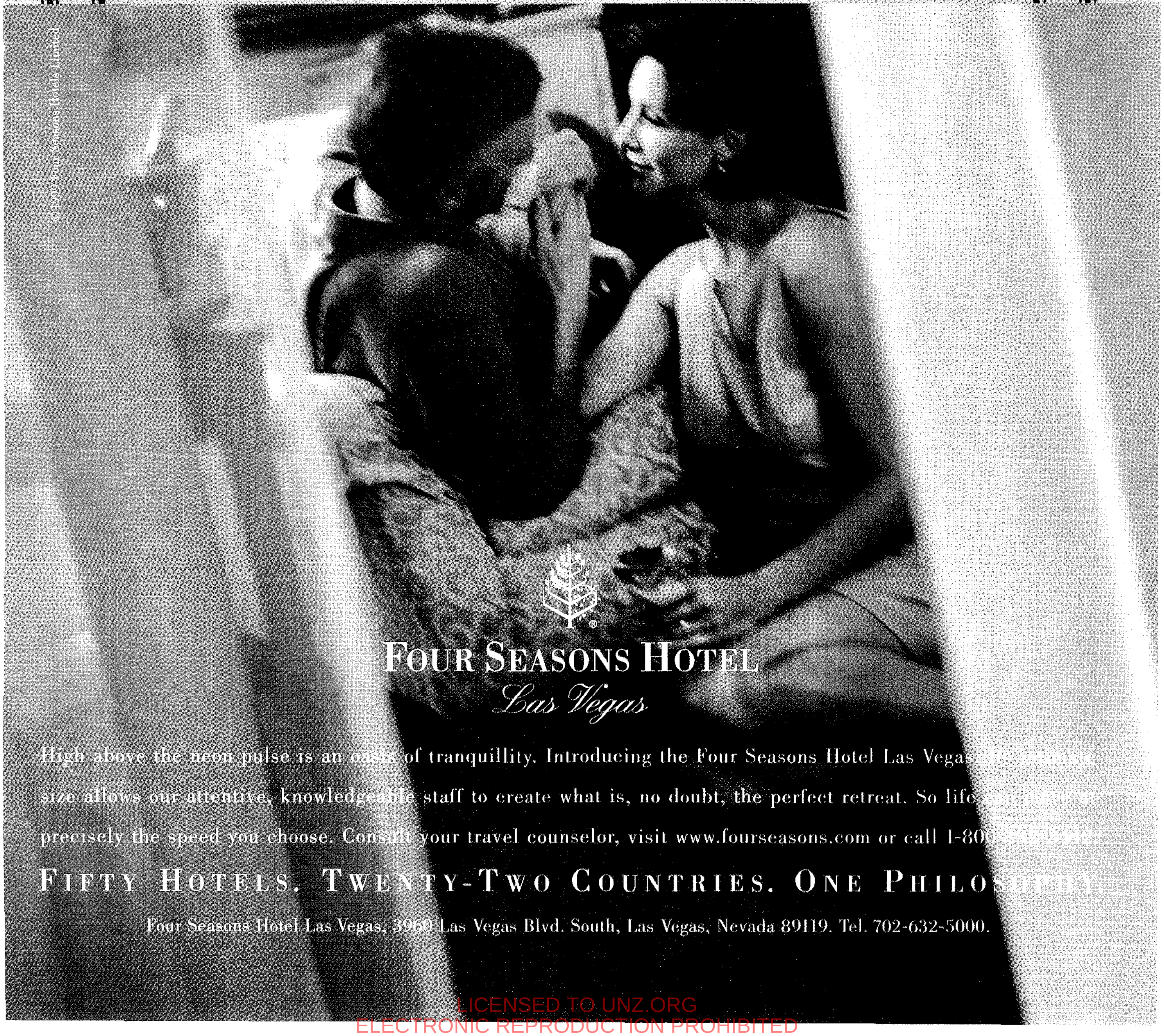

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Pressler Meets the Dutch—Pianist Menahem Pressler joins four wind players from the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra Amsterdam to perform quintets by Franz Danzi, Beethoven, and Mozart. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. Feb. 19 at 8.)

Evgeny Kissin—The pianist's all-Chopin program comprises the Twenty-four Preludes (Op. 28), the Barcarolle, and the B-Flat-Minor Sonata. (Carnegie Hall. Feb. 20 at 7:30.)

Jerome Lowenthal—The pianist performs a plateful of Poulenc, in addition to works by Liszt, Rorem, and Fauré. (Great Hall, Cooper Union, Third Ave. at 7th St. Feb. 20 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

Continuum—The contemporary-music ensemble celebrates Leon Kirchner's eightieth birthday, four days early, by performing a selection of his solo and chamber works from five decades. (Merkin Concert Hall. Feb. 20 at 8.)

Frederic Chiu—Pianist, performing Mendelssohn's E-Major Sonata, Liszt's transcriptions of four Schubert songs, and a passel of Chopin (including the Twelve Études, Op. 10). (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. 288-0700. Feb. 21 at 5.)

Michelle De Young—Mezzo-soprano, with pianist Kevin Murphy, performing works by Schubert, Duparc, and Schoenberg (three of his cabaret songs), among others. (Alice Tully Hall. Feb. 21 at 8.)

Jerry Hadley—The tenor, assisted by pianist Joshua Greene, performs songs and arias from opera and Broadway. (Merkin Concert Hall. Feb. 22 at 8. A benefit concert.)

Ensemble 21—Presenting new works by Lee Hyla, Jason Eckhart, David Felder, Louis Karchin, and Guy Garnett. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. Feb. 22 at 8.)

Perspectives Ensemble—Singer Esperanza Fernandez and guitarist Paco Fernandez perform traditional flamenco songs by way of introduction to Falla's "El Amor Brujo." (St. Paul's Chapel, Columbia University, enter at Broadway at 116th St. Feb. 23 at 8. For information about tickets, call 854-1540.)

Julia Zilberquit—The pianist offers a program composed entirely of bagatelles—in this case, not necessarily the trifles that the name implies. In addition to movements from Beethoven's famous groups (Op. 33, Op. 119, and Op. 126), she performs pieces so identified by Couperin, Saint-Saëns, Liadov, Alexander Tcherepnin, and Edison Denisov. (Merkin Concert Hall. Feb. 23 at 8.)

Emanuel Ax and Yefim Bronfman—Performing piano duets by Debussy, Satie, and Rachmaninoff. (Avery Fisher Hall. Feb. 24 at 8.)

Abbey Simon—The pianist offers an all-Chopin concert that includes the B-Flat-Minor Sonata and the Twelve Études (Op. 10). (Juilliard Theatre, 155 W. 65th St. Feb. 24 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 769-7406.)

Four Nations Ensemble—The period-instrument players offer a program that includes Johann Peter Salomon's chamber transcription of Haydn's Symphony No. 98. (Friends Meeting House, 15 Rutherford Pl., between Second and Third Aves. Feb. 24 at 8. For information about tickets, call 718-622-3695.)

Mala Punica—The thirteen-member vocal and instrumental ensemble performs music of the late-fourteenth-century Italian Ars Subtilior, a mannerist school of composition which explored some of the most intricate rhythmic procedures that have ever been used in Western music; including works by Matteo da Perugia and Zaccaro da Temero. (Church of St. Mary the Virgin, 145 W. 46th St. Feb. 25 at 8. For information about tickets, call 800-627-0655.)

For Francophiles—The Lark String Quartet, harpist Mariko Anraku, and pianist Michael Boriskin team up for a program of works by post-Debussy French composers—Dukas, André Caplet, Dutilleux, and Messiaen—as well as by the Debussy-inspired Arthur Lourié and Toru Takemitsu. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. Feb. 25 at 8.)

Janos Starker and Shigeo Neriki—At the 92nd Street Y, the cellist and the pianist perform all of Beethoven's music for their instruments in tandem. Feb. 25 at 8: The Sonatas No. 1, No. 2, and No. 4, plus the "Judas Maccabeus" Variations. . . . ¶ Feb. 27 at 8: The Sonatas No. 3 and No. 5, as well as the Variations on "Bei Männern."

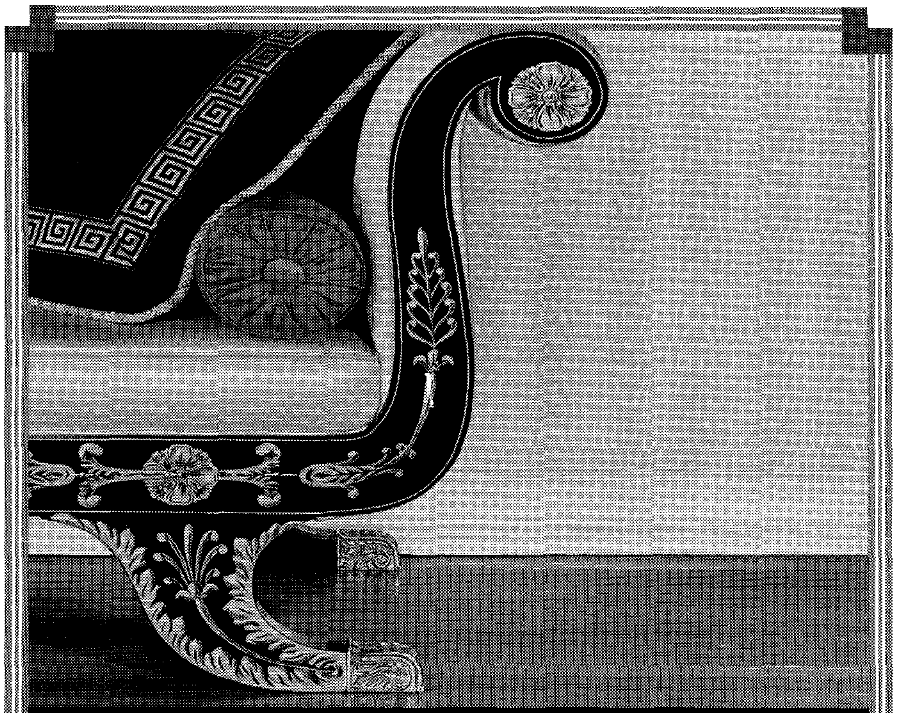
Ruth Laredo—The pianist, with several colleagues, performs and discusses music by Schubert. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. Feb. 26 at 7.)

Fou Ts'ong—The pianist performs an all-Chopin program that includes the Preludes (Op. 28). (Carnegie Hall. Feb. 26 at 8.)

Nina Kuzma-Sapiejewska—Another all-Chopin concert, including the B-Flat-Minor Sonata. (Weill Recital Hall. Feb. 26 at 8.)

New Juilliard Ensemble—Works by Justine Fang Chen, Mason Bates, Liu Sola, Stefano Gervasoni, and Lee Hyla, conducted by Joel Sachs. (Alice Tully Hall. Feb. 26 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 769-7406.)

Music from Japan—Pressure on the yen has made the going a bit tough for this valuable series, but art continues to triumph over Mammon, and the organization is presenting its twenty-fourth season. This year's festival, at Merkin Concert Hall, spotlights the composer Maki Ishii (who will be on hand to conduct as required) and the *shakuhachi* player Teruhisa Fukuda (who is credited with liberating that woodwind instrument from its traditional musical setting). Feb. 27: An address by Mr. Ishii (in Japanese, with simultaneous English translation), at 7, followed by an all-Ishii concert (at 8) that includes his String Quartet, his "Black Intention" (a classic since it appeared, in 1976, and performed here by recorder player Pete Rose), and a new chamber work with *shakuhachi* (featuring Mr. Fukuda). . . . ¶ Feb. 28 at 3: Mr. Fukuda, assisted by *shamisen* player Shihou Kineya, plays *shakuhachi* pieces by Makoto Moroi, Seiko Kineya, Atsuki Sumi, and Choji Kaneta, as well as several traditional pieces. . . . ¶ Feb. 28 at 4:30: A symposium on the state of Japanese concert music.



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Guide to the hottest Broadway shows, museum exhibits, and musical performances.

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THEATRE

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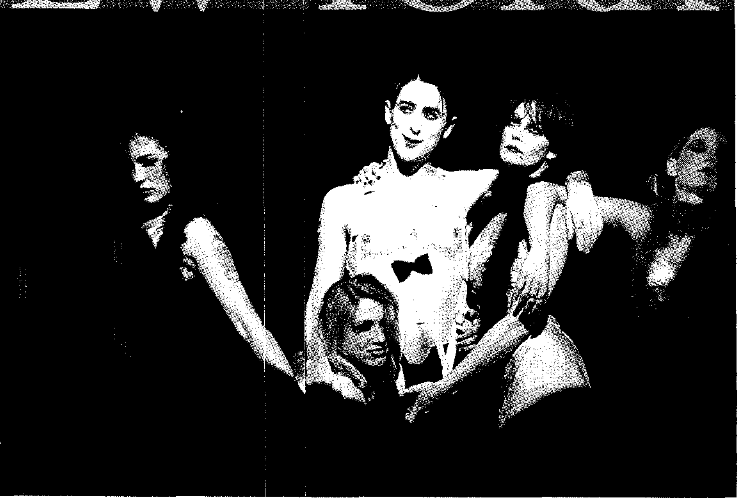

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THEATRE

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CHICAGO

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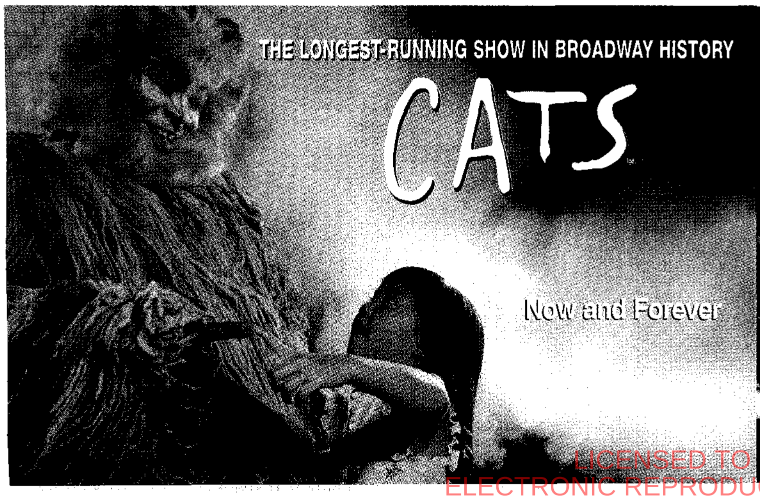
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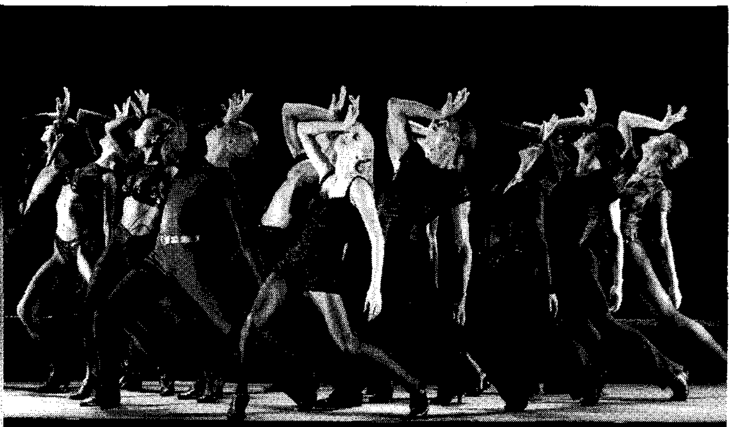
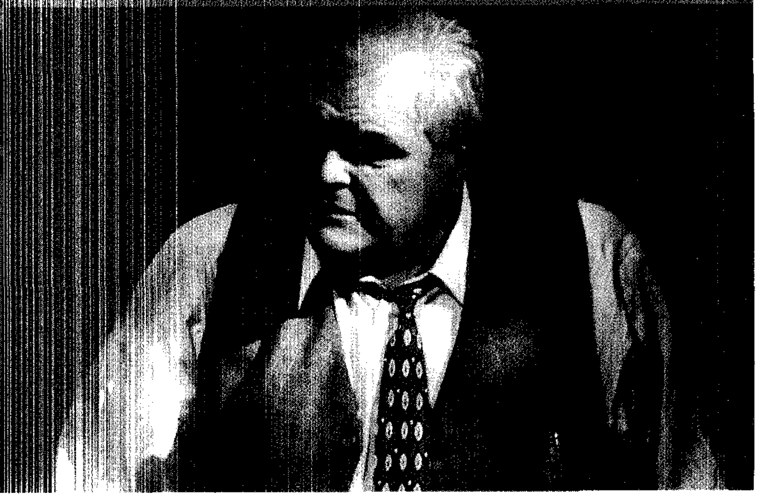


Guide to the hottest Broadway shows, museum exhibits, and musical performances.



CLOSER

1998 Tony Award-winner Natasha Richardson returns to Broadway in Patrick Marber's "Closer"—a dagger-sharp comedy that has wired itself into the cultural vocabulary in a way that few plays have ever done. Performances start on March 9th. **Music Box Theatre, 239 West 45th Street, 212-239-6200.**

DEATH OF A SALESMAN

Arthur Miller's masterpiece returns to Broadway, starring Brian Dennehy in "a production that achieves something rare and splendid." Ben Brantley says "It is hard to imagine a better way to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of a play that seems only to grow larger with age." **Eugene O'Neill Theatre, 230 West 49th Street, 212-239-6200. Or visit us at www.deathofasalesman.com.**

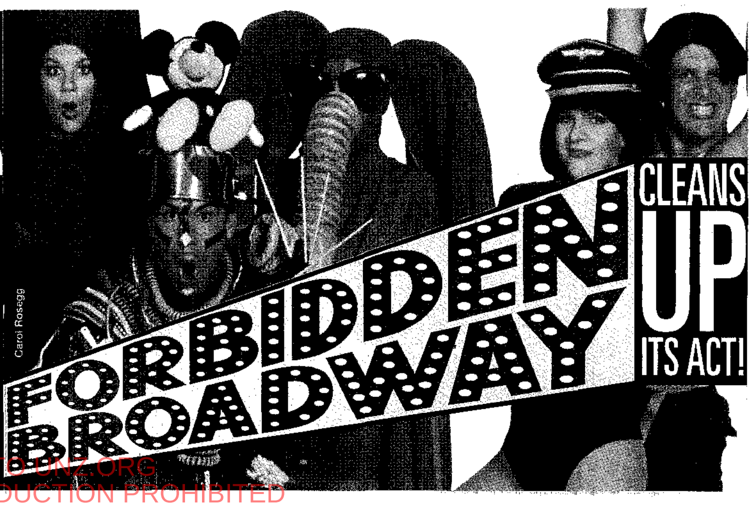
THEATRE

ELECTRA

Olivier Award-winner Zoë Wanamaker stars in Broadway's most acclaimed event of the season. This stunning new production of Sophocles' timeless classic also stars Claire Bloom, Stephen Spinella, Michael Cumpsty, and Pat Carroll. Adapted by Frank McGuinness and directed by David Leveaux, this limited engagement ends March 21st. **Barrymore Theatre, 243 West 47th Street, 212-239-6200.**

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY

The most lauded musical of the season! Theatre-lovers won't want to miss this all-new edition, where Broadway's biggest shows and brightest stars are spoofed by a dazzling cast of comic chameleons. Critics call it "Brilliant!" and "one of the special joys of the New York theatre experience!" **Stardust Theatre, Broadway at 51st Street, 212-239-6200.**



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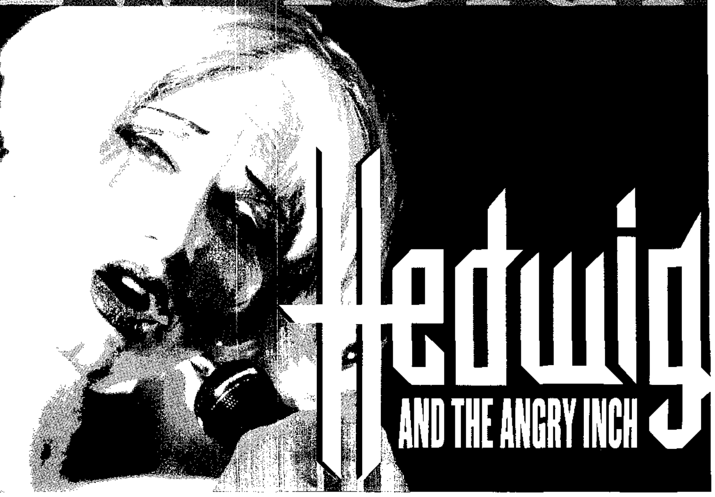
SPOTLIGHT ON NEW YORK

Carol Rosegg



FOSSE

Dancer, choreographer, director, legend. Bob Fosse's sexy style revolutionized musical theatre. Now, his innovative work is setting Broadway on fire again with "Fosse," the new musical Fox-T.V.'s Stewart Klein calls "Fabulous! A feast of art, style, and talent with more sexy bodies than any show in memory! Go!" **Broadhurst Theatre, 235 West 44th Street, 212-239-6200.**

HEDWIG & THE ANGRY INCH

This hilarious and heartbreaking rags to rags story of an internationally ignored rock diva stars Michael Cerveris ("Tommy," "Titanic"). David Bowie calls Hedwig "the most wholly rounded piece of rock theatre we've seen in years!" And it has been hailed as "the first rock musical that truly rocks!" **Jane Street Theatre, 113 Jane Street, 212-239-6200.**

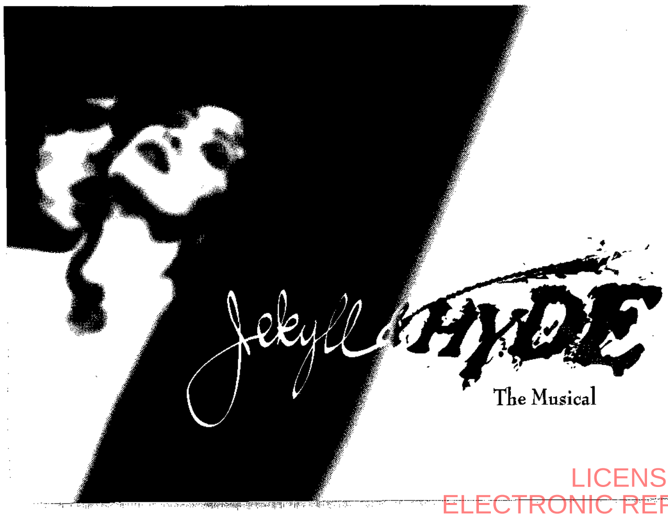
THEATRE

JEKYLL & HYDE

This spring, "Jekyll & Hyde" begins its third smash year on Broadway. The remarkable musical retelling of Robert Louis Stevenson's classic story continues to bring audiences to their feet with its irresistible mix of showstopping songs and powerhouse performances. Called "a phenomenon" by critics. Isn't it time you found out what all the screaming is about? **Plymouth Theatre, 236 West 45th Street, 212-239-6200.**

KILLER JOE

Spend a wild evening with the Smith family, a hilariously inept, trailer park clan willing to murder their mother for insurance money, and discover a place where no one is safe—everyone is expendable. Critics call this X-rated black comedy "Dangerously funny!" "A knock-out!" "A thriller!" "A hit!" And urge you to "Go!" **Soho Playhouse, 15 Vandam Street, 212-239-6200.**



KILLER
JOE

special advertising section

Guide to the hottest Broadway shows, museum exhibits, and musical performances.

MARLENE
THE NEW MUSICAL PLAY

NOT ABOUT NIGHTINGALES
TENNESSEE WILLIAMS
DIRECTED BY TREVOR NUNN

MARLENE

The deep smoky voice. The glamorous gowns. The deliciously seductive songs. The smoldering sexuality. They don't make stars like Marlene Dietrich anymore, but in Pam Gems' new musical "Marlene," the incomparable actress Siân Phillips brings her legend to life. Previews begin March 30th. **Cort Theatre, 138 West 48th Street, 212-239-6200.**

NOT ABOUT NIGHTINGALES

A searing thriller from the pen of American master, Tennessee Williams. "Not About Nightingales" has been hailed as "an evening of astonishing power." Following triumphant runs in London and Houston, it arrives on Broadway—now through June 27th only. Performances are Tuesday through Saturday at 8 P.M.; matinees on Wednesday and Saturday at 2 P.M. and Sunday at 3 P.M. **Circle in the Square Theatre, 50th Street between Broadway and Eighth Avenue, 212-239-6200.**

THEATRE

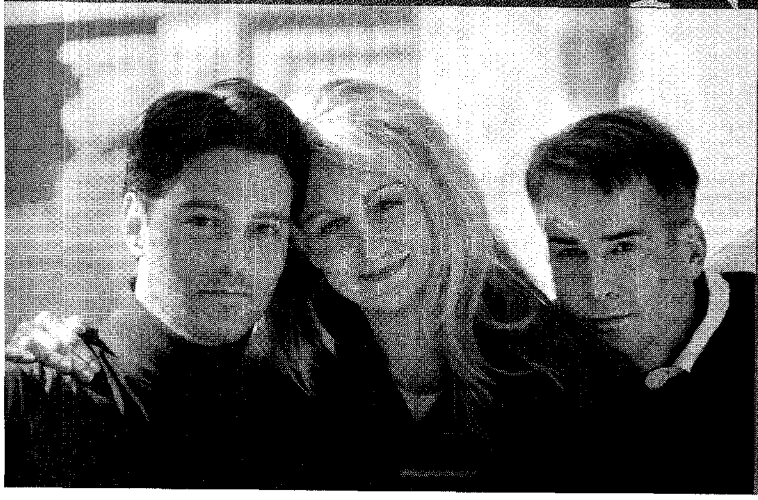
RENT

Winner of the Tony Award for Best Musical, the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, and the show that brought a new audience to Broadway, "Rent" is "the breakthrough musical of the nineties." The music is soaring, the performers are electric, and the message is universal: No day but today. **Nederlander Theatre, 208 West 41st Street, 212-307-4100.**

SIDEMAN

Christian Slater appears in what Rex Reed calls "the best play in town"! Performances Tuesday through Saturday at 8 P.M.; matinees on Wednesday and Saturday at 2 P.M. and Sunday at 3 P.M. **John Golden Theatre, 252 West 45th Street, 212-239-6200.**

SPOTLIGHT ON NEW YORK



The Beauty Queen of Leenane

THEATRE

SNAKEBIT

"A compelling reason for going to the theatre—a smart new comic drama about being thirty-something." David Marshall Grant has written a play that is one of Off-Broadway's hottest tickets. Clive Barnes says "Snakebit" "grips like a boa constrictor with a great sense of humor. It is not to be missed." **The Century Center, 111 East 15th Street, 212-239-6200.**

THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE

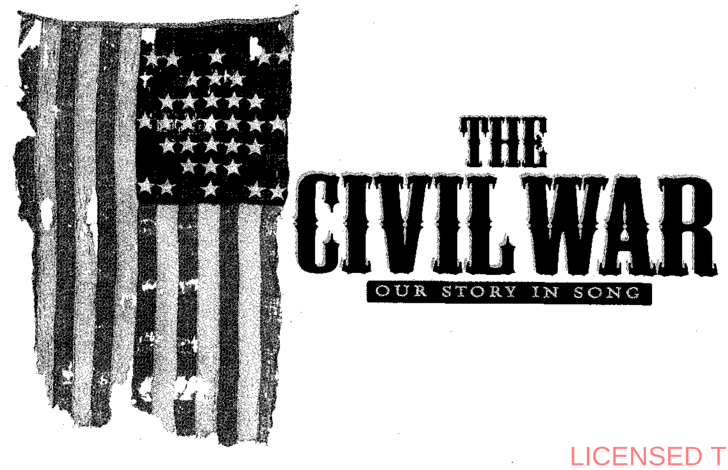
The Number One choice as Best of Theatre in 1998! "The Beauty Queen of Leenane" is the winner of four Tony Awards, and was selected Best Play by the Outer Critics Circle, Drama Desk, and New York Drama League. Hailed as "brilliant and very funny!" **Walter Kerr Theatre, 219 West 48th Street, 212-239-6200.**

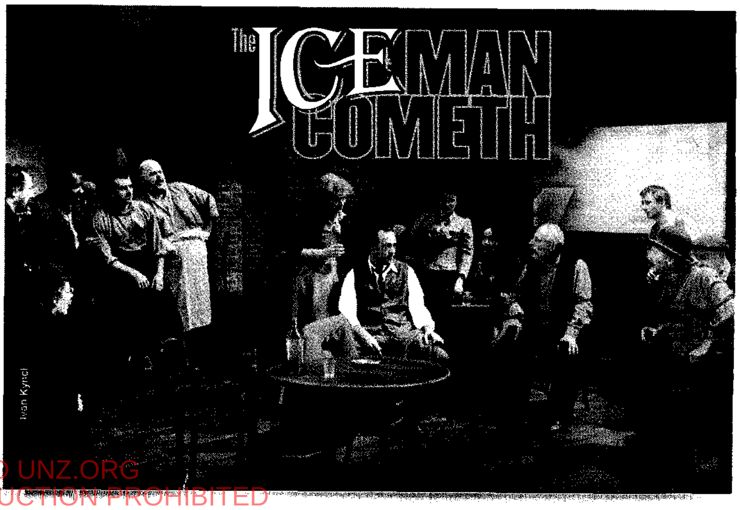
THE CIVIL WAR

From composer Frank Wildhorn ("Jekyll & Hyde" and "The Scarlet Pimpernel") and director Jerry Zaks ("Guys & Dolls") comes "The Civil War." This new Broadway musical recalls the heroes and heartbreak of the first time America was torn in two. Previews begin March 23rd; opening night is April 22nd. **St. James Theatre, 246 West 44th Street, 212-239-6200 or 800-432-7250.**

THE ICEMAN COMETH

Acclaimed by the London critics as "the performance of the decade," Oscar and Tony Award-winner Kevin Spacey now comes to Broadway in "The Iceman Cometh." This sold-out London sensation also stars Tony Danza, Robert Sean Leonard, and Tim Piggot-Smith. Limited twelve-week engagement. *Performances begin March 29th.* **Brooks Atkinson Theatre, 256 West 47th Street, 212-307-4100.**





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Guide to the hottest Broadway shows, museum exhibits, and musical performances.

STARRING
RICHARD CHAMBERLAIN
BEGINNING MARCH 10!

THE SOUND OF MUSIC

The show that Fox-T.V. called "an absolutely stunning, sumptuous production" welcomes Richard Chamberlain back to Broadway to star as Captain von Trapp beginning March 10th. The Rodgers and Hammerstein songs sparkle as brightly as ever. The show begins its second year as one of audiences' "favorite things." **Martin Beck Theatre, 302 West 45th Street, 212-239-6200. Or visit us at www.thesoundofmusic.com.**

THE WEIR

Just nominated for four 1999 Olivier Awards including Best Play and winner of London's *Evening Standard* Award, "The Weir" arrives here March 23rd. "I have rarely been so convinced that I have just seen a modern classic," wrote Charles Spenser of the *London Daily Telegraph*. The *Mail* called it "spellbinding, mesmeric theatre." **Walter Kerr Theatre, 219 West 48th Street, 212-239-6200.**

THEATRE

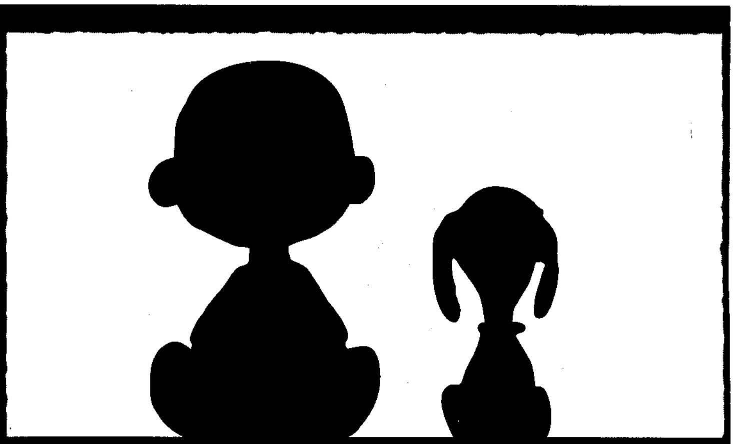
WIT

"Wit" has been hailed by New York critics: Nancy Franklin calls it "a thrilling experience. Its pleasures amount to an amazing grace." And John Simon calls the incomparable Kathleen Chalfant "gallant, glorious, and heroic." Don't miss Margaret Edson's "Wit," directed by Derek Anson Jones. **Union Square Theatre, 100 East 17th Street, 212-307-4100.**

YOU'RE A GOOD MAN, CHARLIE BROWN

It's the Great White Way, Charlie Brown! We've all grown up with them (even though they don't look a day older), and at last Snoopy, Linus, Lucy, and all the "Peanuts" gang are making their Broadway debut. Happiness is starring in your very own musical, and, good grief, it's a hit! **Ambassador Theatre, 219 West 49th Street, 212-239-6200.**

W;t



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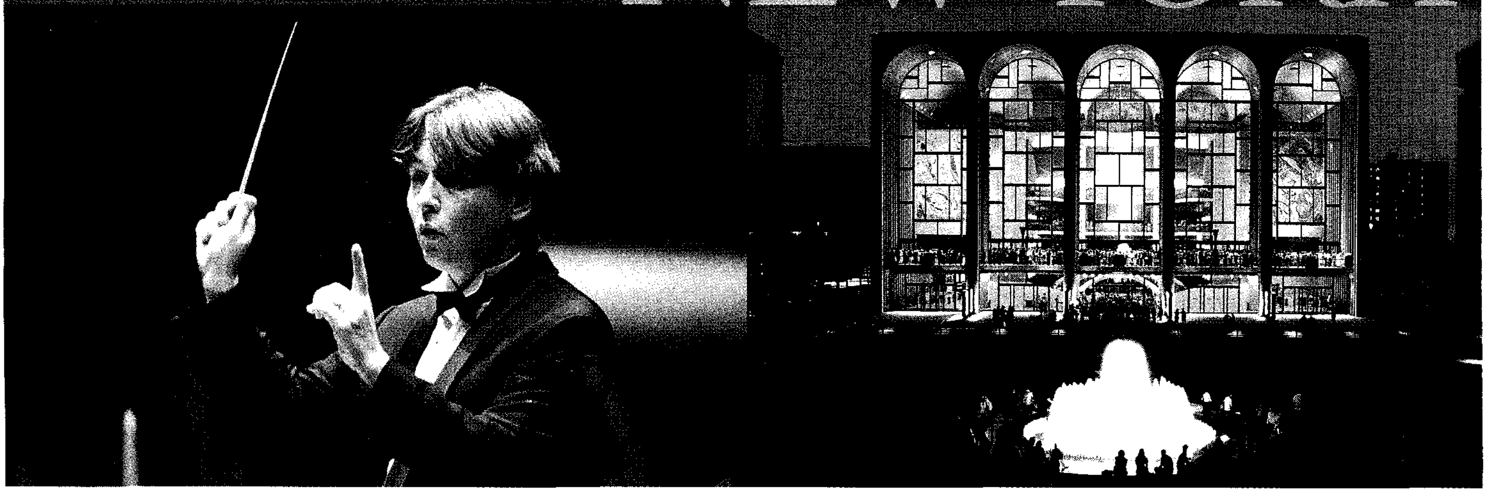
SPOTLIGHT ON NEW YORK



GREAT PERFORMERS PRESENTS THE LOS ANGELES PHILHARMONIC

Lincoln Center's international orchestra series continues with two concerts by musical director Esa-Pekka Salonen and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Friday, March 12th at 8 P.M. the orchestra performs Mozart, Haydn, and Britten. Sunday, March 14th at 3 P.M., the program features Prokofiev's gloriously romantic "Romeo and Juliet." **Avery Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center, 212-721-6500.**

NEW YORK CITY BALLET

This spring (April 29th through June 27th) come celebrate the New York City Ballet's Fiftieth Anniversary with "Swan Lake," Stravinsky, Tschaikovsky and American Music Festivals, and "A Midsummer Night's Dream." **New York State Theater, Lincoln Center, 212-870-5570. Or visit us at www.nycballet.com.**

LINCOLN CENTER

METROPOLITAN OPERA

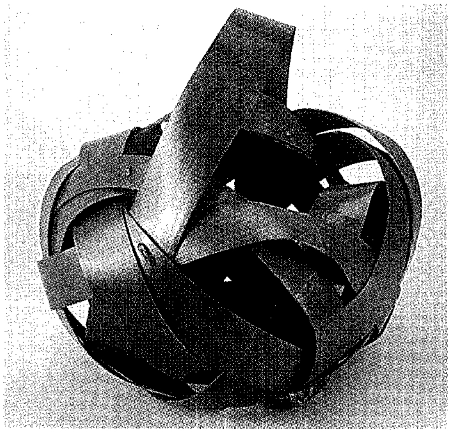
Enjoy the world's greatest singers and the spectacular scenery, costumes, and stagecraft that make each performance at the Metropolitan Opera a truly grand experience. Met Titles provide continuous English text on individual screens at all performances. Now through April 24th. **Metropolitan Opera, Lincoln Center, 212-362-6000. Or visit us at www.metopera.org.**

NEW YORK CITY OPERA

From thrilling new productions of classics ("Madama Butterfly") and rarely performed masterpieces ("Intermezzo") to contemporary classics ("Lizzie Borden"), the *new* City Opera is "a theatrical force of the first order." Join us for our Spring Season March 5th through April 25th. **New York State Theater, Lincoln Center, 212-870-5570; Ticketmaster: 212-307-4100.**

Guide to the hottest Broadway shows, museum exhibits, and musical performances.

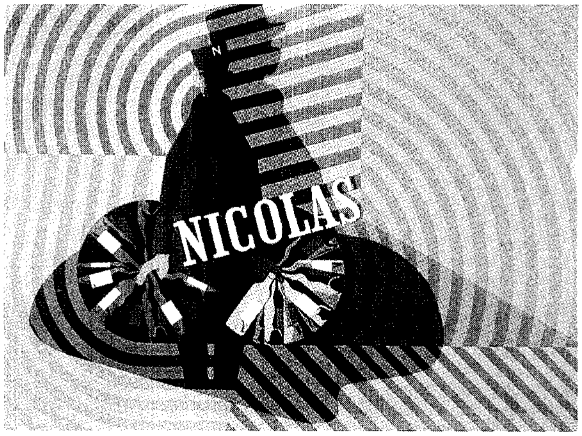
MUSEUMS



Ishikawa Shun

ASIA SOCIETY

One hundred of the finest pieces, selected for their extraordinary beauty and intricate craftsmanship, will be presented to the public for the first time in the exhibition “Bamboo Masterworks: Japanese Baskets from the Lloyd Cotsen Collection.” On view through May 30th. **725 Park Avenue (at 70th Street), 212-517-ASIA.**

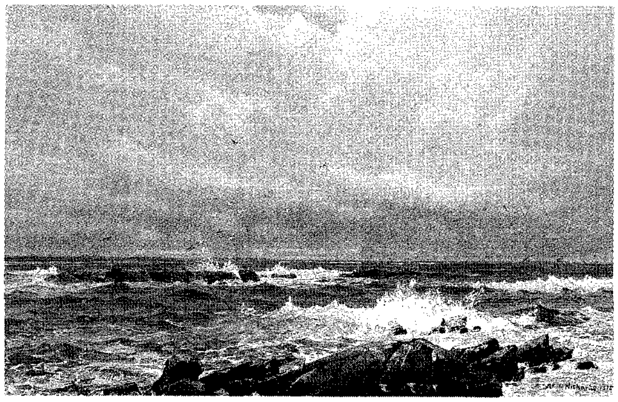


COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM

“Graphic Design in the Mechanical Age” explores the origins of modern media. More than two hundred works—including posters, original collages and maquettes, books, and prototypes—reveal the design process of avant-garde artists experimenting with new techniques of mechanical reproduction, promoting everything from cigarettes to anti-war sentiment. **2 East 91st Street, 212-849-8400.**

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF DESIGN

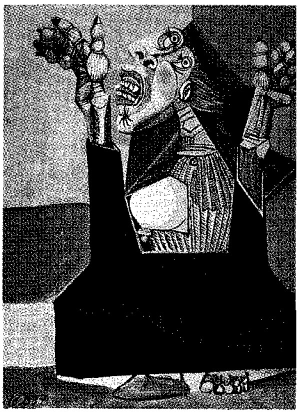
The National Academy of Design has included more than two thousand of this country’s most prominent artists as its members, and it houses one of the most distinguished collections of American art. From “Treasures Revealed,” the first comprehensive exhibition of works on paper (through March 7th), to the 174th Annual Exhibition (March 17th through April 25th), see American art history in the making. **1083 Fifth Avenue (at 89th Street), 212-369-4880.**



“Seascape” by William Trost Richards

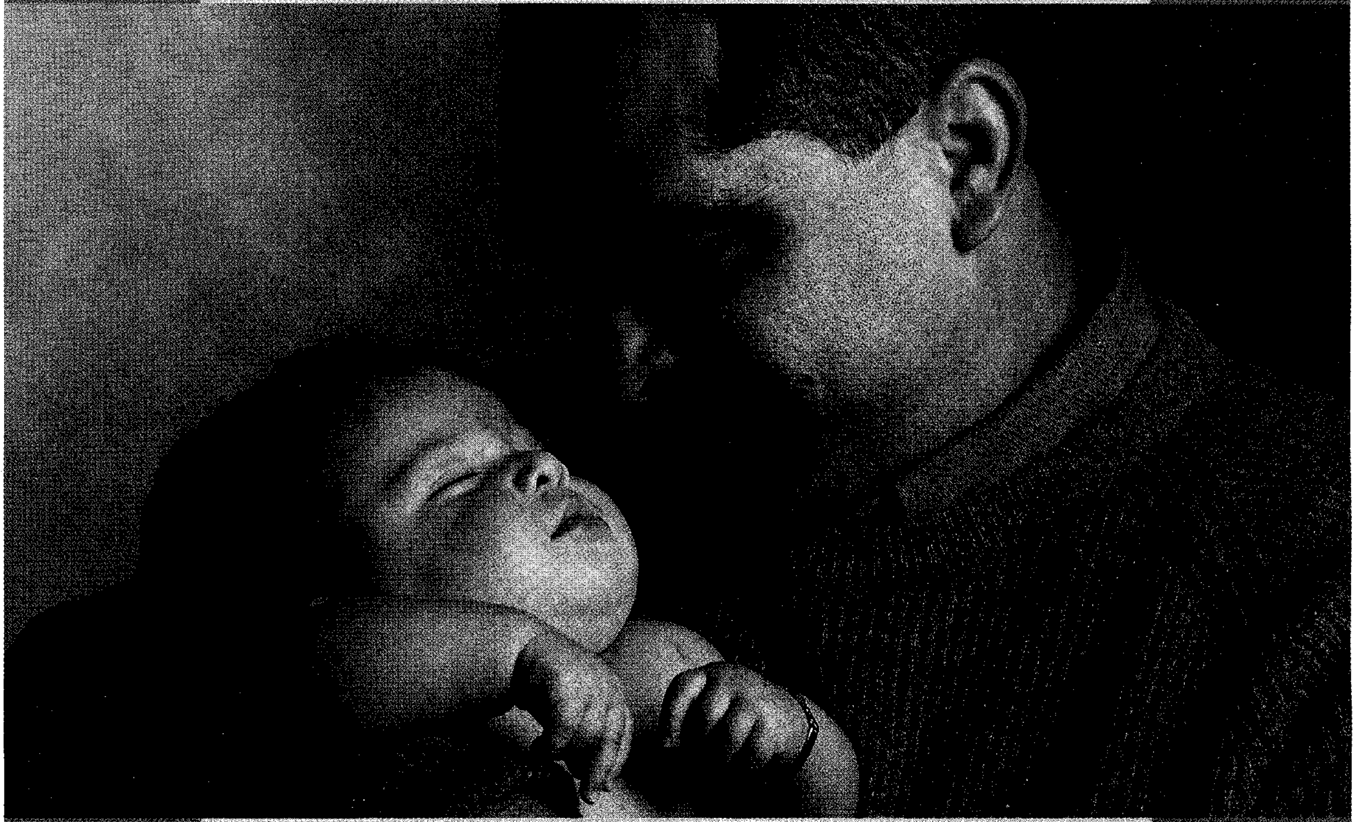
SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Picasso has been acclaimed the most important artist of the twentieth century. “Picasso and the War Years: 1937-1945,” on view through May 9th, brings long overdue attention to this fascinating and expressive period in Picasso’s career. **1071 Fifth Avenue (at 89th Street), 212-423-3500. Or visit us at www.guggenheim.org.**



“The Supplicant” ©1998 Succession Pablo Picasso/ARS

"15 YEARS AGO I HAD TESTICULAR CANCER. THREE MONTHS AGO I HAD A SON."



Luis Reyes was only 23 when he got cancer…for the second time. Six months earlier, Luis had been treated at a local hospital for testicular cancer. But now the cancer was back. Two large tumors were growing in his chest and behind his abdomen. This time Luis' family looked for the best cancer care possible for him. They brought Luis to Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center and quickly realized it should have been their first choice. At Memorial Sloan-Kettering, our doctors treat more cancer patients in a year than most doctors treat in a lifetime. First, we treated Luis with chemotherapy, then delicate surgery to remove the cancer. Today, 15 years later, Luis remains cancer free. But if one miracle in his life wasn't enough, three months ago Luis was touched by another. A son, Matthew, was born to Luis and his wife. If someone you care about needs help and hope, please call us at 1-800-525-2225.

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Wolfgang Holzmair—The honey-voiced baritone performs songs by Schubert and Wolf, all on texts by Goethe. Pianist Russell Ryan assists. (Alice Tully Hall. Feb. 28 at 2.)

Gary Graffman and Friends—The pianist, largely limited to playing left-hand works since an injury in 1979, marks his seventieth birthday by performing Brahms's transcription of Bach's D-Minor Chaconne, études by Reger and Felix Blumenfeld, Korngold's Suite for Piano Left-Hand and Strings (assisted by students of the Curtis Institute, the Philadelphia conservatory he directs), and, with the Guarneri Quartet, Schnittke's Piano Quintet (which Mr. Graffman can negotiate with relatively little demand on the right hand). (92nd Street Y. Feb. 28 at 3.)

Pomerium—The early-music vocal ensemble, directed by Alexander Blachly, focusses its attention on Josquin des Prés, and specifically on his "Hercules Dux Ferrarie" Mass, which he composed in 1503-04, when he was employed by Duke Ercole I of Ferrara. (Corpus Christi Church, 529 W. 121st St. 666-9266. Feb. 28 at 4.)

Met Chamber Ensemble—Members of the orchestra perform Mozart's "Gran Partita" for Twelve Winds and Double Bass, Berg's Four Pieces for Clarinet and Piano, numerous short pieces by Webern (including his Op. 14 songs, with soprano Alexandra Deshorties), and Mendelssohn's Octet. (Weill Recital Hall. Feb. 28 at 5.)

Ciompi String Quartet—At Merkin Concert Hall. March 1 at 8: Quartets by Haydn, Penka Kouneva, and Stephen Jaffe. . . . ¶ March 2 at 8: Quartets by Mark Kuss and Scott Lindroth, as well as Brahms's Piano Quintet (with Andrew Rangell).

New York Festival of Song—Presenting Cuban songs. (Weill Recital Hall. March 2 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

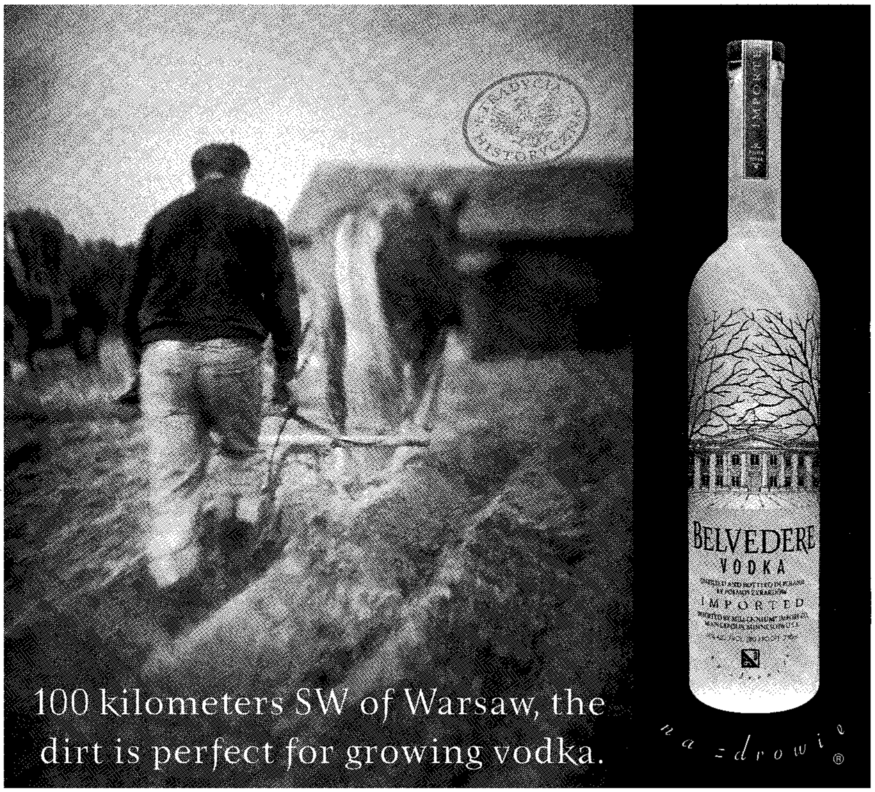
EXCURSIONS

Getting Away from It All—Fire escapes have become an all but invisible element of the urban landscape, in part because the soot of the city makes them practically indistinguishable from their grimy façades, but mostly because New York City pedestrians tend to be in too much of a hurry to bother looking up. But there are some examples of the wrought-iron structures that are ornately crafted and worthy of attention, even if they have nearly outlived their original purpose. (They are now considered a "substandard means of egress," according to Fire Department Battalion Chief George Eysser.) Yet all over the city, fire escapes endure, serving as sun decks, urban back yards, and even objects of contemplation.

The streets just north of Union Square are laced with prime ironwork. On Twenty-second Street west of Broadway, one spindly escape stretches six stories up a plain stone façade. Half a block east, a curious ivory-colored escape spirals down the front of a twelve-story building like a giant Slinky. On the east side of Broadway just north of Eighteenth Street, the neighborhood's finest escape climbs up the front of an 1883 cast-iron-and-brick loft building. This majestic tangle of iron can be considered in comfort: directly across the street is Broadway Futon, which parks a soft red futon chair on the sidewalk each day. Until about 12:45 P.M. on a clear day, the sun streams over the trees of Union Square, warming you as you sit among the squealing cabs and buses, daydreaming of urban escapes.

•

Readings—Feb. 21 at 2: By Samuel Delany and Grace Paley, from their fiction. (Wave Hill, 249th St. at Independence Ave., the Bronx. 718-549-3200.) . . . ¶ Feb. 24 at 8: By novelist Dennis Smith, from his memoir, "A Song for Mary." (Rocky Sullivan's, 129 Lexington Ave., at 29th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Feb. 27 at 3: By poets Rachel Hadas and Samuel Menashe. (Jefferson Market Library, Sixth Ave. at 10th St. No tickets necessary.)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THE MOVIES

OPENING

The Apple—Samira Makhmalbaf's film concerns the true story of twin twelve-year-old Iranian girls who were imprisoned in their house by their parents. In Farsi. Opening Feb. 19. (BAM Rose Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.)

Beshkempir—The Adopted Son—The life of an adolescent boy in the Asian republic of Kyrgyzstan changes dramatically when he finds out he is adopted. Directed by Aktan Abdykalykov. In Kyrgyzstani. Feb. 17-March 2. (Film Forum.)

Blood, Guts, Bullets & Octane—A drama about used-car salesmen and a stolen car. Written and directed by, and starring, Joe Carnahan. Opening Feb. 26.

B. Monkey—A love story about a woman with a criminal past (Asia Argento) and the schoolteacher who loves her (Jared Harris). Directed by Michael Radford. Opening Feb. 26. (Angelika Film Center.)

Conceiving Ada—Multimedia artist Lynn Hershman Leeson directed this story about computers and virtual memory. With Tilda Swinton, Francesca Faridany, Timothy Leary, and Karen Black. Opening Feb. 26. (Cinema Village.)

8MM—Nicolas Cage plays a private investigator in this thriller directed by Joel Schumacher. Opening Feb. 26. (Chelsea Cinemas, Metro Cinema, Murray Hill Cinemas, 64th and 2nd, Union Square, and Waverly.)

Jawbreaker—A black comedy about a group of high-school girlfriends. Written and directed by Darren Stein. Opening Feb. 19.

Just the Ticket—Writer-director Richard Wenk's romantic comedy about a New York City ticket scalper. With Andy Garcia and Andie MacDowell. Opening Feb. 26.

October Sky—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Feb. 19. (Beekman, Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 34th Street Showplace, and Village Theatre VII.)

Office Space—A comedy about a group of twentysomethings, written and directed by Mike Judge. With Jennifer Aniston and Ron Livingston. Opening Feb. 19.

The School of Flesh—A love story about an older woman (Isabelle Huppert) and a younger man (Vincent Martinez). Directed by Benoît Jacquot. In French. Opening Feb. 26. (BAM Rose Cinemas, Cinema Village, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

20 Dates—Filmmaker Myles Berkowitz's record of his dates with twenty women. Opening Feb. 26. (Union Square.)

200 Cigarettes—Risa Bramon Garcia's comedy about a group of friends celebrating New Year's Eve, 1981. Opening Feb. 26.

FILM NOTES

(If a movie has been reviewed recently in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given.)

Affliction—Nick Nolte, committing himself to a difficult part with a manly readiness that inspires affection, even awe, is Wade Whitehouse, a divorced policeman and hired hand floundering badly in a snowbound New Hampshire town. Both kindly and belligerent, Wade misses the meaning and rhythm of events, and reacts too much or too little, erupting in anger over what he should laugh off, ridiculing what he should take seriously. Writer-director Paul Schrader flinches at nothing and takes us deep into the texture and causes of this man's failure. With James Coburn as Wade's horrifying father, Willem Dafoe as his brother, Sissy Spacek as his girlfriend, and Mary Beth Hurt as his ex-wife. Schrader adapted Russell Banks's 1989 novel himself.—*David Denby* (1/11/99) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Coronet Cinemas, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

American History X—A muscled-up and swaggering Edward Norton plays a skinhead neo-Nazi in Venice Beach, California, and screenwriter David McKenna has composed some shrewd tirades for him that push only slightly past standard white working-class resentment. Norton gives the young thug an ambiguous erotic allure; he's almost appealing. Everything else in this melodrama, directed and photographed by the British commercial director Tony Kaye, is to be regretted—it's self-important and garish. The movie was taken away from Kaye during the editing phase. It should have been.—*D.D.* (Sutton and Village East Cinemas.)

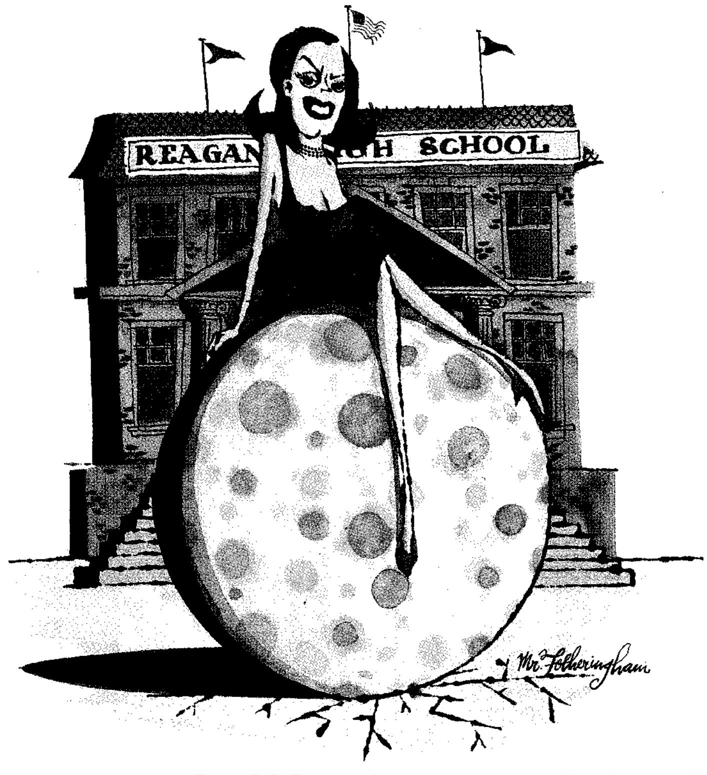
Central Station—Against her nature, Dora (Fernanda Montenegro), an intelligent but nihilistic old bag—a retired schoolteacher who writes letters for illiterate people and then never mails them—leaves Rio de Janeiro with a little boy in tow and takes to the road. The boy's mother has been killed, and his desire to see his missing father stirs something in Dora. The two of them are practically hoboes, but once they leave Rio life opens up for them. This shrewd, tough, and bighearted Brazilian movie, directed by Walter Salles, moves surely and convincingly from utter negation to something like guarded optimism. In Portuguese.—*D.D.* (11/30/98) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Eastside Playhouse, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.)

Children of Heaven—An Iranian boy, Ali (Amir Farrokh Hashemian), loses a pair of pink shoes in the streets of Teheran. The shoes belong to his younger sister, Zahra (Bahare Sediqi), who, because their family is poor, has no hope of getting replacements. For a while, the children share a single pair of sneakers; finally, Ali enters a long-distance footrace in an attempt to win another pair (by coming in third). At this point, Majid Majidi's slight and careful film veers into the hokey—the sight of Ali stumbling in slow motion across the finish line is pure Hollywood, and old-fashioned Hollywood at that. Whenever the action flags, Majidi tends to get out of trouble with a closeup of Ali's tear-smeared face. Still, the movie toughens up as it moves outward from its tender hero to the world beyond. When Ali and his father take a bicycle trip from their poor district to the whitened gleam of the suburbs, they might as well be heading for Mars. In Farsi.—*Anthony Lane* (2/15/99) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

A Civil Action—Jan Schlichtmann (John Travolta), a flashy Boston ambulance chaser, gets caught up in a working-class town's battle with two large corporations that may have polluted its water and caused several deaths. Obsessed, Schlichtmann loses his professional judgment and sacrifices everything to the case. That the story is true (and based on an expertly written book by Jonathan Harr) doesn't make the film any more satisfying dramatically—there's a streak of obviousness in the moral melodrama that dampens one's interest. Robert Duvall gives a witty performance as a seemingly preoccupied and eccentric but actually devastatingly effective litigator. Written and directed by Steven Zaillian.—*D.D.* (1/11/99) (Gotham Cinema, Guild, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village East Cinemas.)

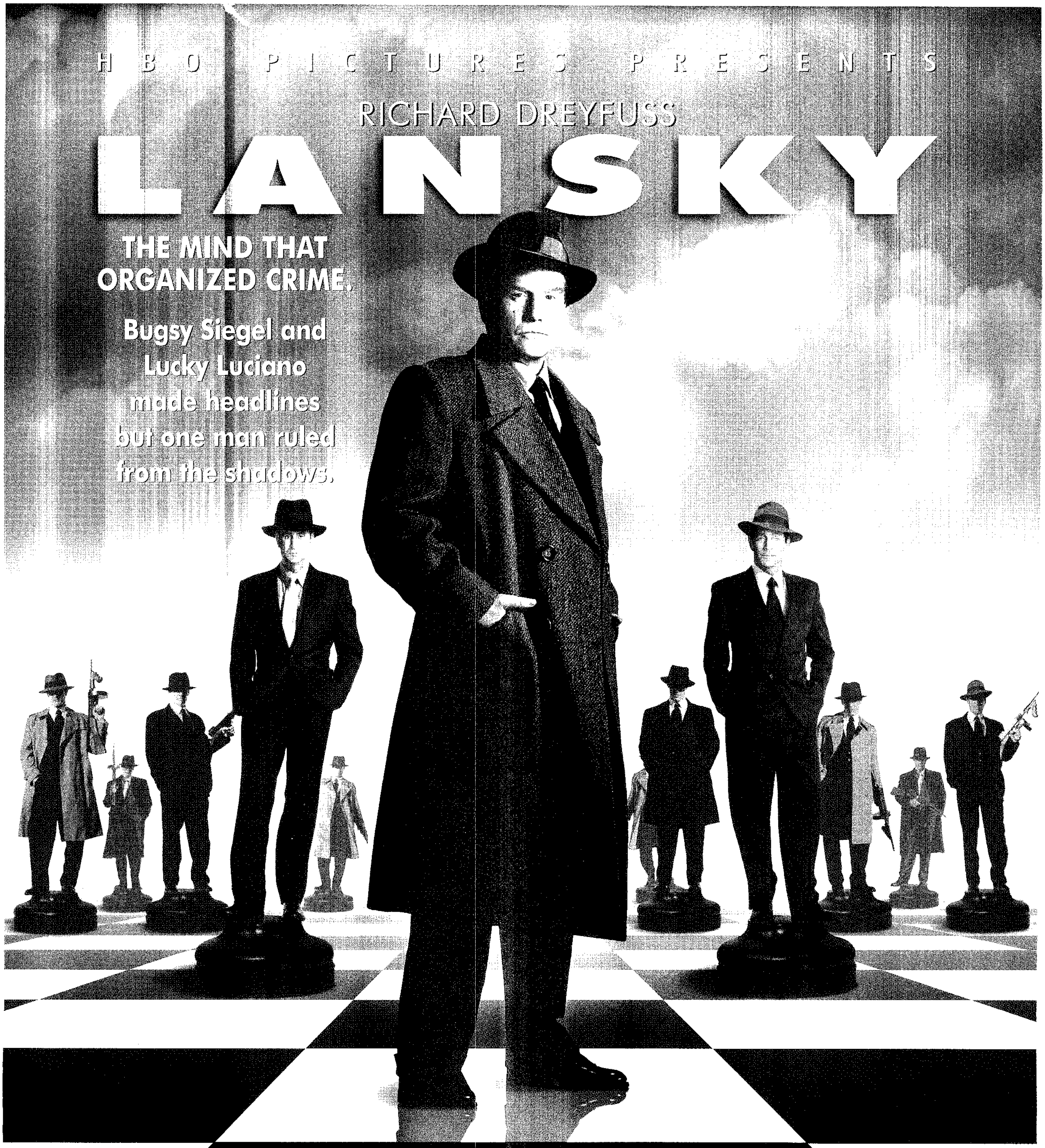
Elizabeth—A grisly, flamboyant account of the Virgin Queen's early days as a monarch. Screenwriter Michael Hirst alters and conflates events that took place over many years—by degrees, Elizabeth (Cate Blanchett), a Protestant surrounded by powerful Catholics, takes control of England by pulling off a kind of internal coup d'état. The means of her ascension is Sir Francis Walsingham (Geoffrey Rush), a perfect Machiavellian character who serves the Queen as adviser, deadly assassin, and spy. Elizabeth's climb to power, however, is a personal disaster: the supple-waisted maiden with long red hair becomes stiff and harsh, emerging from her youth white-faced and trapped in the armor of a thick brocade dress. The movie is a horror film masquerading as a historical pageant. Directed by Shekhar Kapur.—*D.D.* (11/16/98) (Chelsea West, First & 62nd Cinemas, 34th Street Showplace, and Waverly.)

Gods and Monsters—In the nineteen-fifties, the British-born director James Whale, who had lent depth and dignity to the horror film with "Frankenstein" and "Bride of Frankenstein," idled away his time, all but forgotten by the movie industry, in Pacific Palisades, California; eventually, he drowned in his pool. Bill Condon's elegant and tactful picture, based on Chris-



Opening Feb. 19, Rose McGowan in Darren Stein's "Jawbreaker."

EDWIN FOTHERINGHAM



HBO PICTURES PRESENTS

RICHARD DREYFUSS

LANSKY

THE MIND THAT
ORGANIZED CRIME.

Bugsy Siegel and
Lucky Luciano
made headlines
but one man ruled
from the shadows.

Written by DAVID MAMET Directed by JOHN McNAUGHTON

HBO PICTURES PRESENTS A FREDERICK ZOLLO PRODUCTION A JOHN McNAUGHTON FILM RICHARD DREYFUSS "LANSKY" ERIC ROBERTS ILLEANA DOUGLAS
RYAN MERRIMAN WITH BEVERLY D'ANGELO AND ANTHONY LaPAGLIA MUSIC BY GEORGE S. CLINTON EDITOR ELENA MAGANINI PRODUCTION DESIGNER ED McAVOY
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN A. ALONZO A.S.C. PRODUCED BY FRED CARUSO EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS FREDERICK ZOLLO AND NICHOLAS PALEOLOGOS WRITTEN BY DAVID MAMET
BASED IN PART ON THE BOOK "MEYER LANSKY: MOGUL OF THE MOB" BY URI DAN, DENNIS EISENBERG AND ELI LANDAU DIRECTED BY JOHN McNAUGHTON

PREMIERES SATURDAY HBO® FEB. 27, 8 PM ET/PT

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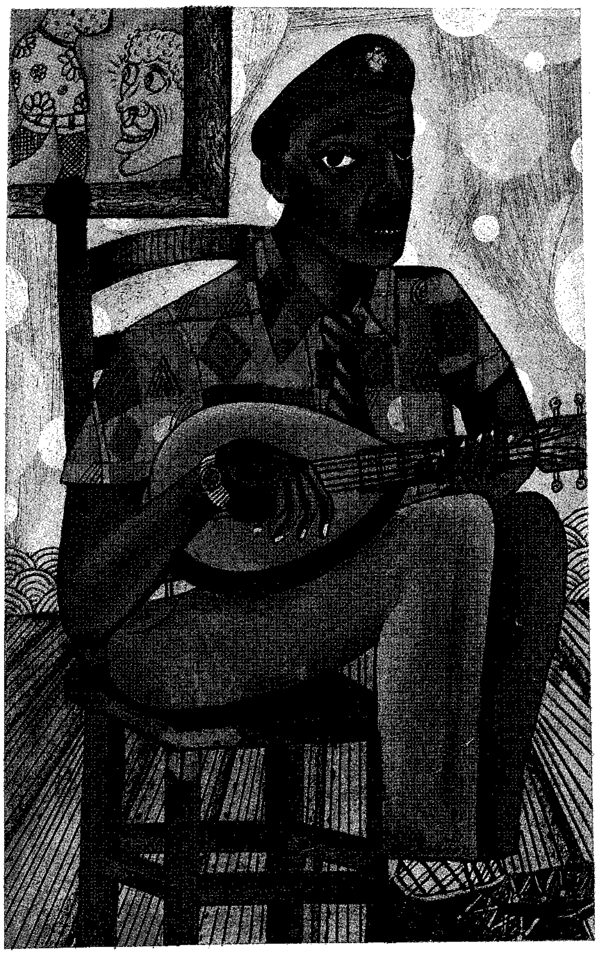
topher Bram's novel "Father of Frankenstein," speculates on what might have happened in those final days. The inquiry draws fine performances from Ian McKellen as the dandyish Whale and from Brendan Fraser as his (wholly fictitious) gardener, Clayton Boone, with whom the older man becomes obsessed. With Lynn Redgrave as a Puritan housekeeper.—*A.L.* (11/9/98) (59th Street East Cinema, Metro Cinema, and Quad Cinema.)

Hilary and Jackie—Anand Tucker's film takes us through the politely fraught story of the cellist Jacqueline du Pré and her sister Hilary. We see them first as young girls, and follow their rivalry; Hilary, the sensible flutist, is gradually outstripped by her more impassioned sister. The sense of period, of ungainly English pride, is funny and acute, but the movie mislays its sense of wit as the girls grow up. The nub of the tale, in which the now famous Jackie (Emily Watson) starts up a rural threesome with Hilary (Rachel Griffiths) and Hilary's husband, Kiffer Finzi (David Morrissey), feels both overblown and oddly beside the point; it certainly means that Tucker takes his eye, or his ear, off the music.—*A.L.* (1/18/99) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Cornet Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

Life Is Beautiful—Would that it were. The great, donkey-faced Italian clown Roberto Benigni attempts an ambitious fable of comedy's redemptive power. He plays an Italian Jew who keeps alive his little boy's innocence in a Nazi concentration camp by pretending that the routines of the camp are no more than an intricate game staged for his son's benefit. But Benigni's ironic counter-reality undermines this movie, not the Nazis, who were beyond ridicule for the same reason that they were beyond rationality. Totalitarianism makes the fantastic literal—that is its demonic appeal. Benigni's jokes and games just aren't enough, and you leave the movie thinking that what's touching is not Benigni's ministrations to the little boy but his own need to believe in comedy as salvation. With Giorgio Cantarini, who has the heartbreaking quality of the children in the old neorealist movies, as the boy. In Italian.—*D.D.* (11/16/98) (Angelika Film Center, Murray Hill Cinemas, Paris, and Park & 86th Street Cinemas.)

Louie Bluie (1985)—The leader of America's last black string band, Howard Armstrong—a.k.a. Louie Bluie—is an instinctive fiddler/mandolinist, a primitive painter (sort of a sexy Grandma Moses), an inveterate womanizer, and the author of "The ABC's of Pornography." Musically, he sees himself less as an innovator than as an avatar of a great tradition that was born in the Deep South, in the jug and washboard harmonies of makeshift backwater bands. His whole approach, to music and to life, is to pour everything into his own spicy, bubbling gumbo. This joyous, hell-raising movie salutes the kind of unself-conscious cultural eruption that bypasses the textbooks. Terry Zwigoff directed, ten years before he did "Crumb."—*Michael Sragow* (American Museum of the Moving Image; Feb. 28.)

Marius (1931)—The first film of the celebrated Marcel Pagnol trilogy. Static and visually unimaginative (Alexander Korda directed) but famous for its dialogue and characterization, and for the rich humanity Raimu brought to the role of César, the Marseilles café owner. The story involves César's son, Marius (the elegant Pierre Fresnay, oddly miscast), who longs to go to sea, though he loves Fanny (Orane Démazis). Written by Pagnol. In French.—*Pauline Kael.* (Florence Gould Hall; March 2.)



At A.M.M.I., Terry Zwigoff's "Louie Bluie."

CHRISTIAN CLAYTON

Message in a Bottle—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Chelsea West, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, State, and Union Square.)

My Name Is Joe—At the beginning of Ken Loach's funny and excoriating new movie, Joe (Peter Mullan) announces that he is on the wagon. This being Loach, you can be fairly certain that Joe will spend the next ninety minutes falling off it again, and, sure enough, he winds up in a foul blur of booze. What comes in between—and, in a terrible way, sets him back on the path of self-destruction—is a love affair. This unemployed Glaswegian meets a health worker called Sarah (Louise Goodall), who appears to offer him a better sort of life. But his old habits and connections die hard, and Mullan's combative, unsentimental performance makes Joe's slow ruin not just credible but unavoidable.—*A.L.* (2/1/99) (BAM Rose Cinemas and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . ¶ Cinema Village; through Feb. 25.)

Payback—Every so often Mel Gibson likes to get down and dirty for one of his unglamorous roles; the last such occasion was "Ransom," and now he appears as Porter, a grim-faced criminal who was cheated of seventy thousand dollars by his wife (Deborah Kara Unger) and his associate (Gregg Henry). The movie, which delights in its low-lit scumminess, follows Porter on a quest to retrieve his money and, more broadly, to assert his determined free spirit. This entails the indifferent slaughter of those who stand in his way—men from the Outfit, for example, a mysterious cabal that holds their city in its clutches. The picture was filmed mostly in Chicago, although the place is never named, and the writer and director is Brian Helgeland, although he was ousted from the project before the end; reports are that almost a third of it was rewritten and reshot. No surprise, then, that the result should be a mess: half-jokey and dumbly violent, with performances that flail all over the place. (Special mention should go to the twitching of Gregg Henry's facial muscles.) The script was based on Richard Stark's novel "The Hunter," which was also the source of the 1967 Lee Marvin movie "Point Blank." If you're looking for an existential hero on a revenge kick, Marvin is still your man.—*A.L.* (2/15/99) (Astor Plaza, 84th Street Sixplex, Metro Cinema, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Showplace, and Village Theatre VII.)

Rushmore—Wes Anderson's smart, refreshing picture is all about Max Fischer (Jason Schwartzman), who is in the tenth grade at Rushmore Academy—or, to put it in Max's own terms, in heaven. He runs everything from the school beekeepers to the rather ambitious theatre group; he hangs out with Mr. Blume (Bill Murray), the father of a pair of schoolmates; and, although his grades are woeful, he compensates by falling in love with a teacher, Miss Cross (Olivia Williams). Blume, too, falls in love with Miss Cross, and from here on, Max's world starts to come apart at the seams—not that you would know it from his big, blank, bespectacled face. The whole movie marks the triumph of the deadpan; Schwartzman is cautious but stubbornly optimistic, while Murray is possessed by the mania of near-despair, but neither kicks up much of a fuss. What could have been merely arch or wacky turns into something more touching—a mature riff on the absurdity of growing up.—*A.L.* (12/7-14/98) (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Union Square.)

Saving Private Ryan—Steven Spielberg's new picture, one of his best, is a sandwich. The meat of the tale concerns a bunch of U.S. Army Rangers, led by Captain John Miller (Tom Hanks), who are sent into Normandy to rescue the sole survivor of four brothers. On either side of this bold endeavor you get half an hour of unyielding combat: first, the D Day landings on Omaha Beach and, later, a consummate last stand in which too few Americans try to hold a bridge against too many Germans and too many tanks. Spielberg has arranged his violence into a semblance of pure disorder. The illusion holds, complete with severed limbs and wellsprings of blood, and it feels honorable; Spielberg's preachy movies can be an awful grind, but, apart from a disposable coda, this new work is too swift (and often too inaudible) to weigh you down.—*A.L.* (8/3/98) (Criterion Center, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

Shakespeare in Love—A ripely emotional comedy-fantasia—concocted by director John Madden and screenwriters Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard—of how Shakespeare came to write "Romeo and Juliet." In 1593, young Will (Joseph Fiennes), a stud with liquid eyes and full lips, is just an unhappy and unproductive hack, jealous of the greater Christopher Marlowe (Rupert Everett). At first the movie comes at us too broadly, with many facetiously anachronistic jokes about the grubby professional routines of the theatre. But Will falls in love with the fictional heiress Viola de Lesseps (Gwyneth Paltrow), and when these two poeticizing lovers climb into bed, and Shakespeare's quill begins to fly, the cleverness catches fire and "Shakespeare in Love" turns into an exciting literary-erotic entertainment.

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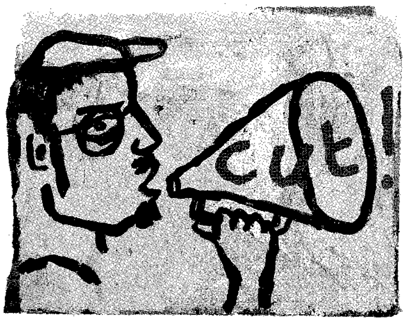
With Geoffrey Rush as the theatre manager Henslowe and Judi Dench as a supremely intelligent and wittily dominating Queen Elizabeth.—*D.D.* (12/21/98) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema II, Cinema 3rd Avenue, Lincoln Square, Olympia, Orpheum VII, and 34th Street Showplace.)

A Simple Plan—Sam Raimi's sturdy attempt to do a contemporary, snowbound "Treasure of the Sierra Madre." Three ordinary guys—a married college man who has settled into a routine job (Bill Paxton), his slightly woolly-brained brother (Billy Bob Thornton), and the town drunk and screwup (Brent Briscoe)—discover $4.4 million in a downed airplane lodged in the snow. What to do with the cash? The picture becomes a study of the nasty effects of greed and of the weakness of civilization's bonds.—*D.D.* (First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, and Village Theatre VII.)

The Thin Red Line—Terrence Malick's first film in twenty years is about a company of American troops at Guadalcanal. What happens, in essence, is that they come ashore and take an enemy-held hill; somehow, Malick, who was never a man to be hurried, spins this simple action out to nearly three hours. The cast includes Nick Nolte, Sean Penn, Elias Koteas, John Savage, Woody Harrelson, George Clooney, and John Travolta, with strong performances from younger actors like Ben Chaplin and Jim Caviezel, but they all drift in and out of the action, never staying long enough to hold center stage. Malick seems to like his characters lonely—they talk to themselves in voice-over but rarely connect with other men. The result is a ravishingly strange mess: part bloody action movie, part pantheistic trip.—*A.L.* (12/28/98 & 1/4/99) (84th Street Sixplex, Orpheum VII, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.)



KAREN CALDICOTT

ALSO PLAYING

BLAST FROM THE PAST: Chelsea Cinemas, Coronet Cinemas, Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.... **DRY CLEANING:** Quad Cinema.... **THE GENERAL** (reviewed in our issue of 12/21/98): Village East Cinemas.... **GOD SAID, "HA!":** Film Forum.... **HANDS ON A HARD BODY:** Village East Cinemas.... **THE LAST DAYS:** 62nd & Broadway.... **LITTLE VOICE:** Chelsea Cinemas and Union Square.... **MY FAVORITE MARTIAN:** Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, East 85th Street, 84th Street Sixplex, Sutton, and Village Theatre VII.... **PATCH ADAMS** (1/25/99): Criterion Center, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.... **PLAYING BY HEART** (2/1/99): Lincoln Square, 72nd Street East, and Village East Cinemas.... **SHE'S ALL THAT:** Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, Orpheum VII, State, and Union Square.... **SIMPLY IRRESISTIBLE:** Lincoln Square, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Union Square.... **TANGO:** Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.... **THE TRIO:** Quad Cinema.... **THE 24 HOUR WOMAN:** Union Square.... **WAKING NED DEVINE:** First & 62nd Cinemas, Olympia, and Union Square.... **YOU'VE GOT MAIL** (12/28/98 & 1/4/99): Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

Film Forum 2, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—A program of films directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Through Feb. 25: "Psycho" (1960).... Feb. 26-27: "Shadow of a Doubt" (1943).... Feb. 28-March 2: "The Man Who Knew Too Much" (1956).

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—A program of films from Italy; most in Italian, with English subtitles. Feb. 18 at 2:30 and Feb. 21 at 4: "Once Upon a Time in America" (1984, Sergio Leone; in English).... Feb. 18 at 6:30 and Feb. 22 at 2:30: "Too Bad She's Bad" (1955, Alessandro Blasetti).... Feb. 19 at 2:30 and Feb. 23 at 6: "Milarepa" (1973, Liliana Cavani).... Feb. 19 at 6 and Feb . 21 at 2: "The Lizards" (1963, Lina Wertmüller).... Feb. 20 at 2 and Feb. 25 at 6: "The Organizer" (1963, Mario Monicelli).... Feb. 20 at 5 and Feb. 25 at 2:30: "Family Diary" (1962, Valerio Zurlini).... Feb. 22 at 6 and Feb. 23 at 2:30: "La Notte Brava" (1959, Mauro Bolognini).... Feb. 26 at 2:30 and March 2 at 6: "The Future Is Woman" (1984, Marco Ferreri).... Feb. 26 at 6 and Feb. 28 at 2: "Ostia" (1970, Sergio Citti).... Feb. 27 at 2 and March 1 at 6: "The Mattei Affair" (1972, Francesco Rosi).... Feb. 27 at 5 and March 1 at 2:30: "The Days of Rosa" (1981, Salvatore Piscicelli).... Feb. 28 at 5 and March 2 at 2:30: "Variety Lights" (1949, Federico Fellini).... ¶ Feb. 18 and Feb. 25 at 6: Two different programs in a series about the history of 8-mm. film and video in the United States.... ¶ Feb. 19 at 3, 6, and 8; Feb. 21 at 5:30; and Feb. 26 at 6 and 8: Six different programs in a series of British documentary short films.... ¶ Feb. 19 at 8:30: "Artists and Models" (1955, Frank Tashlin).... ¶ Feb. 20 at 2 and Feb. 21 at 3: A showing of the five films nominated for the Academy Award in the short-documentary category.... ¶ Feb. 20 at 5 and Feb. 21 at 12:30: A showing of the short films nominated for Academy Awards in the animated and live-action categories.... ¶ Feb. 25 at 6:30 and Feb. 26 at 3: "Gypsy Heart" (1998, Jocelyn M. Ajami), a documentary.... ¶ Feb. 26 at 8: "The Black Cat" (1934, Edgar G. Ulmer).... Feb. 27 at 1:30, 3:30, and 5:30 and Feb. 28 at 2 and 5: A showing of the five films nominated for the Academy Award in the feature-length-documentary category.

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600)—A program of films from Cuba; in Spanish, with English subtitles. Feb. 17 at 2 and 6:15: "Parting of the Ways" (1985, Jesús Diaz).... Feb. 17 at 4 and 8:10: "Up to a Certain Point" (1983, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea).... Feb. 18 at 2 and Feb. 19 at 4 and 8:20: "Patakin" (1983, Manuel Octavio Gómez).... Feb. 18 at 4 and Feb. 19 at 2 and 6:15: "Portrait of Teresa" (1979, Pastor Vegga).... Feb. 20 at 4 and Feb. 23 at 4:10: "House for Swap" (1984, Juan Carlos Tabío).... Feb. 20 at 6:15, Feb. 23 at 8:30, and Feb. 24 at 2: "A Successful Man" (1987, Humberto Solás).... Feb. 20 at 8:30: "Alicia in Wondertown" (1990, Daniel Díaz Torres).... Feb. 21 at 6:15 and Feb. 24 at 4:15: "Adorable Lies" (1992, Geraldo Chijona).... Feb. 21 at 8:30, Feb. 24 at 6:20, and Feb. 25 at 2: "Strawberry and Chocolate" (1994, Gutiérrez Alea).... Feb. 23 at 2 and 6:15: "Plaff! or Too Afraid of Life" (1988, Tabío).... Feb. 24 at 8:30 and Feb. 25 at 4:10: "Guantanamera" (1996, Gutiérrez Alea and Tabío).... ¶ A program of films directed by Gillo Pontecorvo; most in Italian, with English subtitles. Feb. 26 at 2 and Feb. 28 at 6:30: "The Wide Blue Road" (1956).... Feb. 26 at 4:45, Feb. 27 at 3:45 and 9:30, and March 2 at 2: "Kapo" (1959).... Feb. 26-27 at 6 and Feb. 28 at 9:10: "The Battle of Algiers" (1966; in French).... Feb. 26 at 9:45 and March 2 at 4:15 and 9: "Burn" (1969).... ¶ Feb. 27 at 2: "Wind in the Willows" (1997, Terry Jones).... ¶ March 2 at 7: "Long Time Since" (1998, Jay Anania).

American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Feb. 20 at 2: A program of short animated films, all featuring jazz.... Feb. 20 at 4:30: A program of Vitaphone short films, 1929-1944, featuring jazz musicians.... Feb. 21 at 2: "Paris Blues" (1961, Martin Ritt).... Feb. 21 at 4: "Round Midnight" (1986, Bertrand Tavernier).... Feb. 27 at 2: "Jazz on a Summer's Day" (1959, Bert Stern).... Feb. 27 at 4: "Mickey One" (1965; Arthur Penn).... Feb. 28 at 2: "Imagine the Sound" (1981, Ron Mann).... Feb. 28 at 4: "Louie Bluie" (†).

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Feb. 23 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Contempt" (1963, Jean-Luc Godard; in French).... March 2 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Marius" (†).

59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.—From Feb. 23: The 15th Annual Israel Film Festival. (For information about show times, call 532-2075.)

Lincoln Square, Broadway at 63rd St. (336-7669)—A series of films released by Columbia Picture. Feb. 17: "The Bridge on the River Kwai" (1957, David Lean).... Feb. 18: "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner" (1967, Stanley Kramer) and "Tootsie" (1982, Sydney Pollack).... Feb. 19-21: "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" (1977, Steven Spielberg).... Feb. 22-23: "From Here to Eternity" (1953, Fred Zinnemann) and "On the Waterfront" (1954, Elia Kazan).... Feb. 24-25: "Taxi Driver" (1976, Martin Scorsese).

THEATRE ADDRESSES

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(For show times, call 777-FILM, except where noted.)

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. (718-623-2770).
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
86th Street East Twin, Third Ave. at 86th St.
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Guild, 33 W. 50th St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

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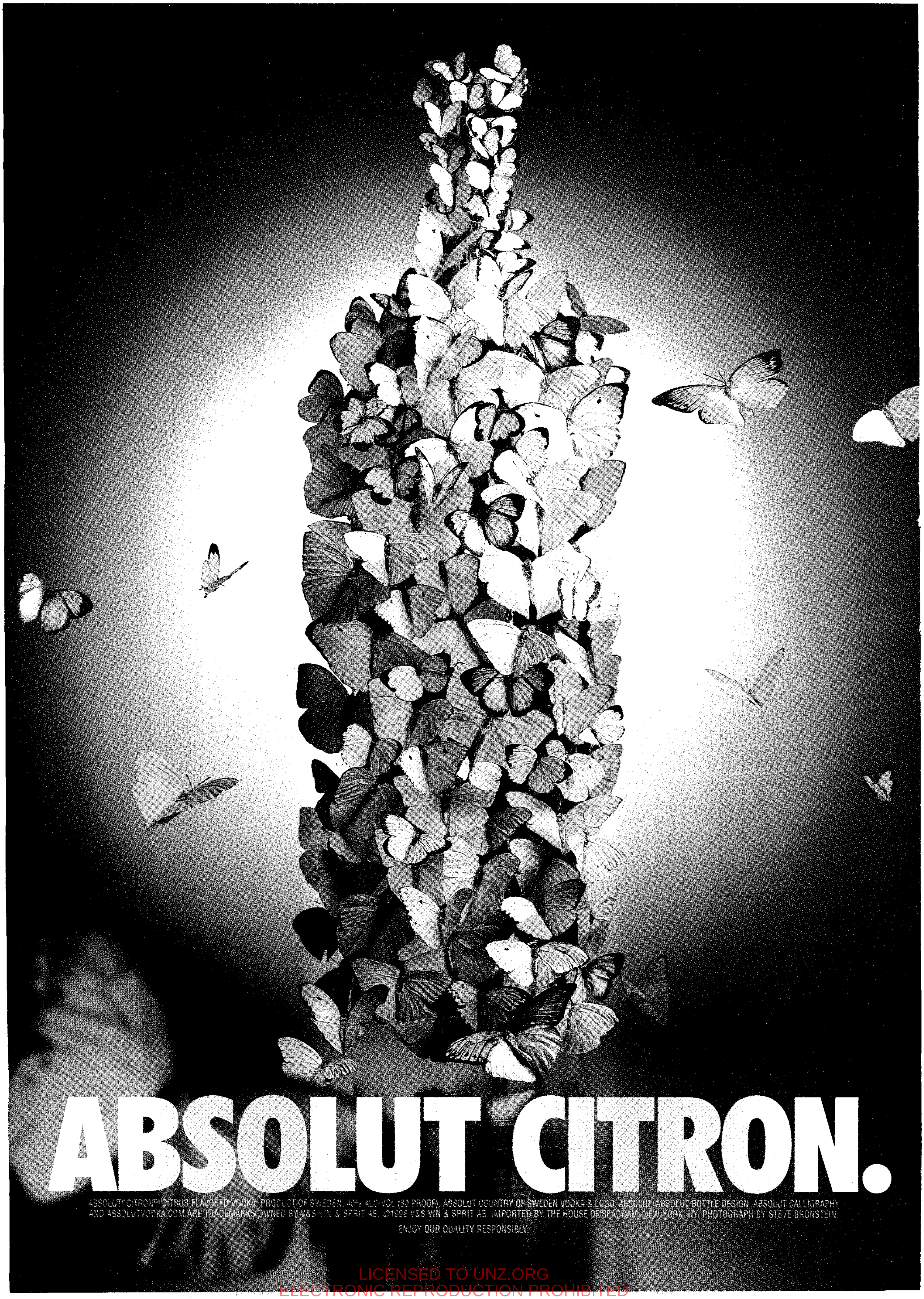

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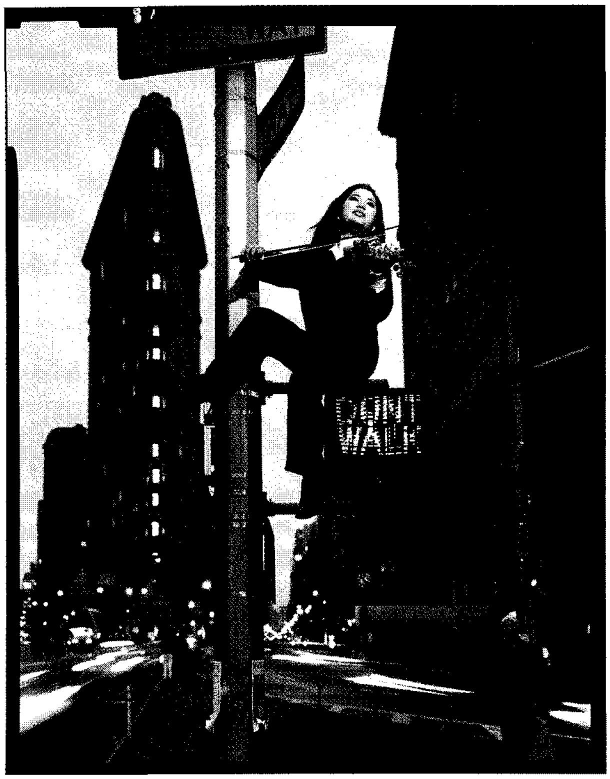


SARAH CHANG, *violinist, Flatiron Building, December 28, 1998.*

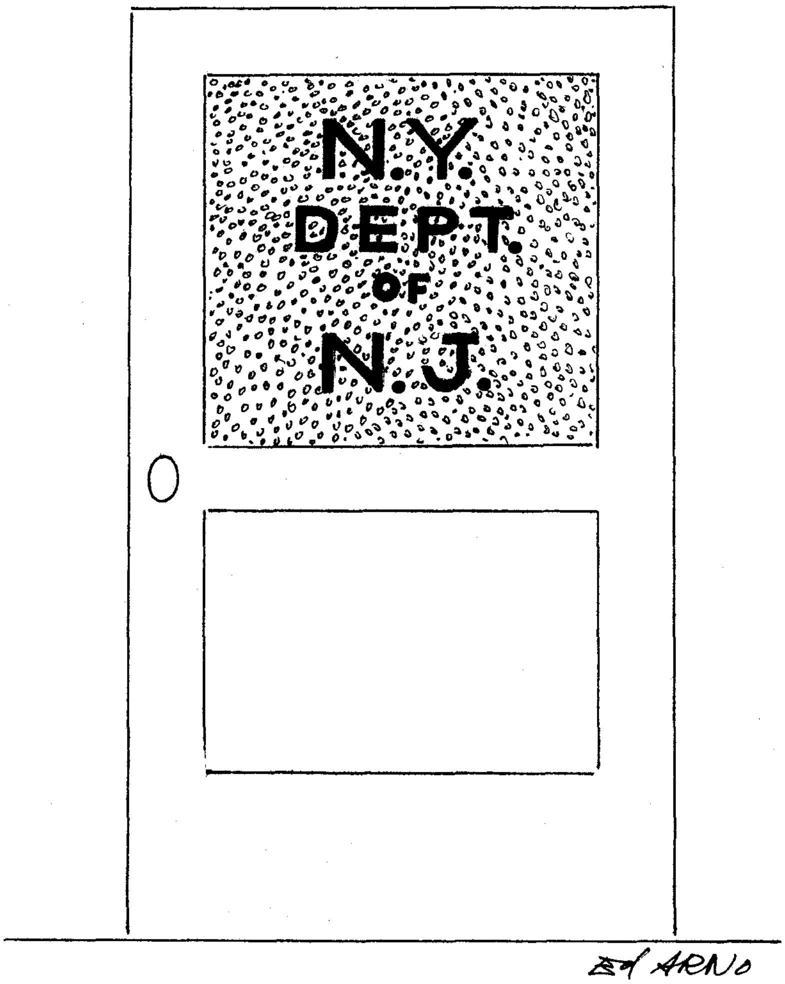
COMMENT

The thing about this city.

PEOPLE come to New York because they're looking for something, only to find once they get here that the city raises more questions in one's soul than it answers; to be a New Yorker is to be a person who frequently asks himself, "What am I doing here?" A diehard New Yorker has learned to live with that question, the way one learns to live with a bone spur. Feeling that he more or less owns the place, and impatient with the many impingements on his ease, he is more likely to voice the question "What are all these *other* people doing here?" Here anything is possible; here everything is impossible. It's a city you never get tired of; it's a city that tires you out. You're crazy about it; it drives you crazy. There's no getting around it: New York makes no sense.

Like a never dormant, ever erupting volcano, New York is an endless spectacle, full of irrationalities that flow in smooth, well-worn channels and splutter wildly through the air, and—depending on where you happen to be standing, figuratively and literally—the spectacle can be a source of threat or of beauty. New York has the power both to demand your attention (and you had better answer the call, unless you want to get hit by a speeding taxi) and to reward it: contemplation—and use—of some of its improbably well-functioning features can bring you daily in touch with the miraculous. The subway system, Central Park, the New York Public Library—no one can comprehend how these things work, but you can't help noticing that they all, amazingly, do their important jobs quite well.

But the grab bag of the city's gifts is a mixed bag, and the gifts don't always



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match what's on our wish lists. Did anyone ask *you* whether you wanted city-sponsored music in the subways? Are the drummers in subway stations the result of a petition calling for more percussion underground? Had there been a percussive *vacuum* down there? (The inescapable noise in this city, aboveground, belowground, everywhere, is one of the factors that make New York—to borrow a trope from Chicago, the City of Big Shoulders—the City of Tense Shoulders.) And was it you who called the city a couple of summers ago and said, "Hey, see if you can get Disney to screen 'Pocahontas' in Central Park, but don't open it to everybody"? Were you the one who cried out to HBO that there wasn't enough bad standup comedy anymore, and could it please redress this wrong and ruin summer lunch hours in Bryant Park, behind the library, by sponsoring the amplified blatherings of supposedly funny people?

It is hard to locate the will behind much of what passes for largesse in New York, but the will is palpably there, and it appears to be a tight weave of nearly indistinguishable municipal and corporate fibres. Whatever you think of the results of the cleanup of Times Square, the speed with which the transformation occurred proves that where there's a will there's a way. It's easy to envision what miracles might yet occur in New York if some of this will, this vigor, this *muscle* were put to more varied and more serious use: imagine what could happen if the psychic capital that the Mayor expended last year on lobbying for an absurdly unnecessary sports stadium were spent instead on improving the city's public schools. (And perhaps the ubiquitous ex-Mayor Ed Koch could be persuaded to donate some of his self-promotional energy, or the fee for his latest gig—a TV commercial for a local radio station, in which Hizzoner stands in front of a deli counter and sings "That's the way, uh-huh, uh-huh, I like it"—to the cause.)

The economy, as we read in the papers every day, is booming. It's a wave whose size and curl have an undeniable appeal, and those who want to surf it can't be blamed for grabbing their boards and trying to get the ride of a lifetime. Some will be swept along, and others will be, or have already been, swept away. And some simply don't find the waters to their liking. It has always been that way. Is New York better or worse than it used to be? The argument goes on; certainly there will never be a dearth of things to complain about and to crow about. One thing is inarguable: there's no place like it anywhere else. You can't blame people for deciding not to live here, but you do have to wonder about people who have never at least *wanted* to live here. Here you will have the worst and the best days of your life, and your response to both will be the same: Only in New York.

—Nancy Franklin

INK

Boy scribes inflame Little Flower.

Like every other New York kid who came into his teens in the nineteen-thirties, I had President Roosevelt by heart (chin, cigarette, Groton accent, T.V.A., soak the rich) but felt much closer to Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia. Stubby under his operatic black hat, hilariously busy, looking by turns indignant, disbelieving, and delighted, the Little Flower had piercing dark-brown eyes and a thick jaw that looked punishing when he was talking about fat-cat landlords or Tammany bosses but often fell into an engaging, half-open smile. He ran New York for a dozen years like a manic dad cleaning out the cellar on a Saturday afternoon. The LaGuardia voice was high-pitched, excitable, and whiny—I should know, because I listened to it, from the next room, for the better part of nine hours one January day in 1936, while I waited for our interview. Well, maybe not "our"—it's not as if he knew I was coming.

Home from boarding school on Christmas vacation, I had taken the

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subway down to City Hall with my friend David Maclay, each of us being in need of a celebrity interview as part of the tryout for a school newspaper. We weren't competitors—David's new school was in Pennsylvania, mine in Connecticut—but we were emboldened by our eight prior years together as classmates at the progressive Lincoln School, on West 123rd Street, a fountainhead of juvenile overconfidence. Mulling potential interviewees, we had rejected Fred Astaire (too far away) and Joe Louis (too scary) before settling happily upon the Mayor, who was just then winding up his second year in office.

Arriving at eight-thirty in the morning, notebooks in hand, we presented ourselves before the Mayor's secretary in City Hall—a youngish, not unfriendly fellow whose name I have forgotten.

"Press," I announced.

"Here for a—uh, interview," David said.

"No appointment, I take it," the secretary said. He carefully wrote down our names and the names of our publications, and showed class by not asking our age, which was fifteen. "Take a seat, boys," he said. "It may be a while."

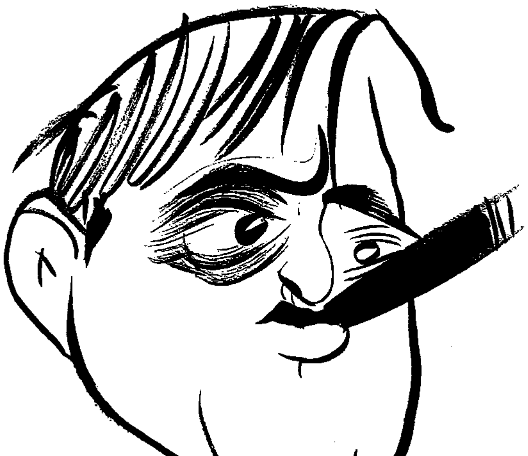
We had expected this, and had come prepared with magazines but not lunch. Eagerly, patiently, wearily, we sat and watched and listened as politicos and petitioners, City Council members, women in hats, editorialists, judges, commissioners, and real-estate magnates arrived, were greeted within, reappeared, and took their leave. Even when the tall door to LaGuardia's office was closed, we could hear the ceaseless mayoral yammer, rising in impatience or laughter, cajoling and caressing in argument, like an offstage tenor in a bad opera. Longer than an opera. Noon came and went, the light crept across the dusty windows of our chamber. Noticing us at last, a motherly-looking woman on the Mayor's staff brought us a couple of chicken sandwiches and an Oh Henry! bar. We sat on. Dark had fallen outside when the secretary, emerging from a brief exchange with Hizzoner, beckoned us forward. "You're on," he said, "but make it snappy."

I can remember LaGuardia's dishevelled black hair, and the tough gaze that flicked over us while he gestured us toward a couple of chairs. He was in shirtsleeves. The mayoral feet, below the mayoral leather chair, did not quite touch the carpet.

"Reporters—right?" he said. "What'll it be, fellas?"

Whatever it was, it didn't go well. We had some questions about the transportation system, I think—the Mayor had been promising to take down the El lines along Sixth and Ninth Avenues—and maybe about his campaign against smutty burlesque shows.

"But I'm on record about all that," he said, breaking in. "What else?"



Fiorello LaGuardia

"Is Tammany Hall about to—" David began.

"Nah!" he said, holding up one hand. "Not a chance!"

We weren't quite done. "Sir," I said, reading from lines that David and I had put together during our long wait, "each of us is in the ninth grade in a really good private school. Do you believe that there are any students in the New York public schools who are getting the kind of education we are?"

"What!" he cried. "What was that?"

Nuclear fission had not yet been discovered, but the explosion before us now mounted and thickened abruptly, darkening around its whitish inner fires, and drooping foully along the top. Rumbling and squeaking by turns, waving his arms, the Mayor unloaded his full package. Why, the New York public-school system was the envy of the entire United States—no, the envy of the free world. Boys and girls of all races and origins and from every neighborhood came to it, flourished and grew wise, and were set free. Didn't spoiled kids like us know anything? Look at Billy Rose! Look at Justice Pecora, Eddie Cantor, Elmer Rice—New York public-school kids all. Borough President Lyons. Jimmy Cagney. Ira Gershwin, Ethel Merman. What about his own wife, Marie LaGuardia, who had gone to school on the Lower East Side? Why, he himself, born on Sullivan Street but exiled to distant outposts in his youth (the Mayor's father had been a United States Army bandmaster), had passed his boyhood yearning only to come back and go to public school in New York.

Scrawling excitedly, flipping pages, underlining, David and I tried to capture fragments of the oratory on our narrow notebook pages.

Famous city schools abounded, the Little Flower went on—Erasmus Hall, Curtis High, Stuyvesant. Art and music instruction flourished here, as in Athens. Had he mentioned Eddie Cantor? By the third grade, talented city kids were already playing on municipal violins and clarinets, not to mention enjoying a nutritious and delicious hot lunch every day. High-school swimming pools! Foreign languages! Chess clubs! Greek and Latin, even! Football. Calculus—

There was a pause, and we looked up to see the Mayor staring at us.

"Hold on," he said. "Wayddd a minute! Did you two . . . ?" He pointed a finger. "Why, you kids set me up, didn't you? You got me going—right?"

David and I exchanged guilty smiles. My face was hot.

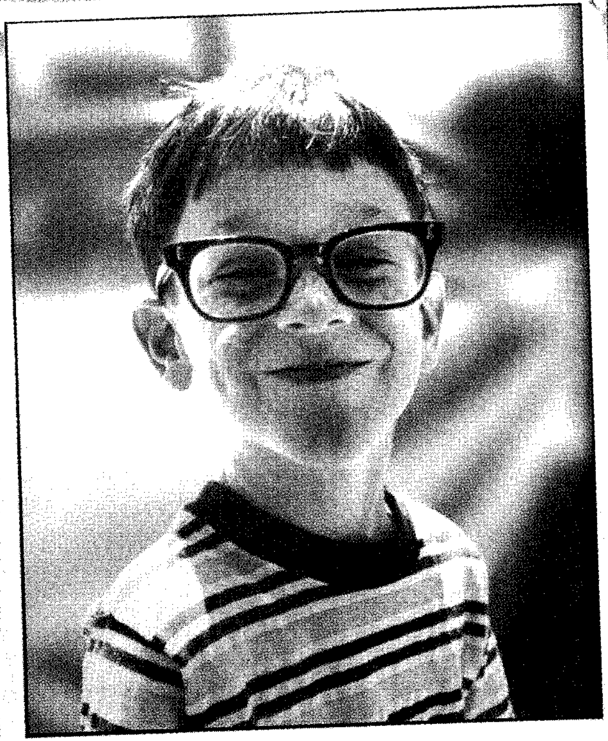
The Mayor threw up his hands. "Ya got me," he said. "I'll be Goddamned—I can't believe it." He shook his head. "Good night, boys," he said, picking up some papers. "You got a hell of a story."

Yelling and gabbling, David and I crowded onto the rush-hour I.R.T. and rode home in triumph. Each of our LaGuardia stories subsequently saw print, and each of us made the paper. Was it that same week or later on, I wonder, when our exploit began to gnaw at me? Why should it have stayed with me all this time? All we had done was to strike an ugly pose, tell a trifling lie, in order to chivy some quotes out of an obliging public figure. How could we have let him down this way? We had behaved like little wise guys, just to get a story. We had become reporters.

—ROGER ANGELL

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

Overland Park Independent ▪ January 27, 1999 ▪ 6



Amazon.com Stumps Overland Park Whiz Boy

Finding a place big enough to hold 4.7 million video, CD and book titles proves a daunting task for six-year old Oliver Rosenfield.When asked what he thought about all the attention, Oliver said "get out of my room."

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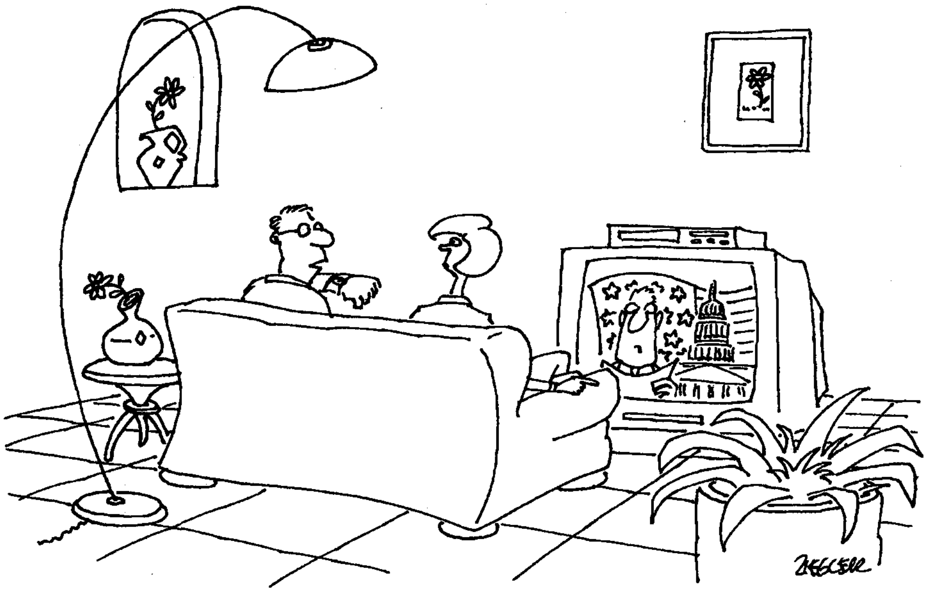
WORKS IN PROGRESS DEPT.

Slow burn at a private-school mixer.

Two hundred and fifty seventh-grade boys and girls from the single-sex Independent schools came to the Goddard Gaieties annual dance last month. It cost forty-five dollars a ticket and was held in the basement of the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, on upper Park Avenue. The ritual event, started by and for the benefit of the Goddard Riverside Community Center, has been going on since the mid-nineteen-forties. At that time, a live orchestra was engaged to play the traditional waltzes and foxtrots, and the children were required to "dress"—little suits and ties, little party dresses and gloves. In the nineteen-seventies, with the coming of rock and roll, the music became canned and amplified, and the dress code became "casual." Now the boys had on T-shirts, mightily oversized jeans or khakis, and sneakers, and the girls had on tank tops or flimsy, tight cardigans, jeans, and thick-soled sneakers or platforms. The boys didn't have much in the way of muscles. The girls didn't have much in the way of breasts. The children, tense and anxious, were escorted to the entrance by tense and anxious parents, who clearly showed that they wanted to hang around. The boys and girls clearly showed that they wanted them to leave. The parents left.

Colored balloons hung from the ceiling. Off to one side, punch and cookies were at the ready on a table monitored by chaperons. At the far end, opposite the entrance, a young, single-earringed, goateed and cheerful d.j. wearing bluejeans was setting up his station, which came with a small stage platform emblazoned with the silver-lettered logo of the music providers, "EJM—The Life of the Party . . ." (EJM's fee for the party was five hundred and seventy-five dollars.) The m.c., a confident, muscular young black man, in black pants and a black T-shirt, was testing a cordless mike.

The boys and girls waited, trying not to look around at each other. A group of boys who knew each other from Collegiate, Buckley, St. Bernard's, and Browning horsed around, pointedly ignoring a small group of girls waiting nearby who knew each other from Chapin, Brearley, Spence, Marymount, and Nightingale-Bamford. Some girls greeted each other with overjubilant, strained squeals of joy or of simulated surprise. Boys played it cool and shook the hands of other boys lackadaisically. Everybody seemed to be mirrored in somebody else. Nobody was fat. The trousers of the boys sagged over their no-hips. The girls clumsily swung their pipestem arms around each other and then didn't seem to know how to unloosen them. So they shook them up and down purposelessly. They kicked their pipestem legs away from each other in awkward moves, anticipating the actual dancing. Their tiny, firm backsides revealed no gelatinous motion.



"That was fun. What time does the next trial of the century start?"

One tall-for-her-age girl wearing thick-soled Vans sneakers and a baby-blue hooded pullover offered me some dispassionate elucidation:

"I don't like tank tops? They're completely out of season? I think they're, like, silly? Some of these boys are, like, weird? One of them is mean to me. He says mean things about people with overbite? Not about *my* braces, about my friend's braces? He's got braces, too. Everybody has braces. He's mean about my friend? Because she chews gum? But she can chew gum, because there's this, like, special gum you buy for chewing gum with braces? So this boy is mean about the gum? Just because he doesn't like gum. See? He's over there with his clump. The schools, like, clump together? He says mean things about the way I sing along when they play 'Flagpole Sitta'?"

She sang, "I run it up the flagpole to see who salutes, but no one ever does." She had a good voice. "It's alternative rock?" she said. "It's a punk band but not, like, very punk? This is a two-hour party. I wish this was, like, a four-hour party?"

"Welcome, everybody!" the m.c. was saying into his mike at a decibel level that caused the punch to slosh on the table. "Let's start the party!"

The action was slow to get going. No wild party this. At the urging of the m.c., a few girls hesitantly stepped forward. They danced with each other. Then the boys did the same. The d.j. spun one song after another, so that "Pretty Fly (For a White Guy)" ran perilously close to Frank Sinatra singing "Come Fly with Me." Louis Prima's "Jump, Jive an' Wail" ran confusingly into the Cherry Poppin' Daddies' "Ding-Dong Daddy of the D-Car Line." By the time "YMCA" came on, the dancers had loosened up. Boys and girls were mixed up on the floor. They took turns jumping onto the EJM platform and dancing on it. There was a contest, more or less, for the "Best Singer." Prize: a T-shirt bearing the EJM logo. There was a contest for the girls taking turns dancing hip-hop with the muscular m.c. There was more hip-hop dancing and raving and a contest involving "coffee grinder" moves. More T-shirt prizes.

A quartet of girls in tank tops and platform shoes harmonized in a rendition of an Aaliyah ditty that went, "Are you that somebody boy I've been

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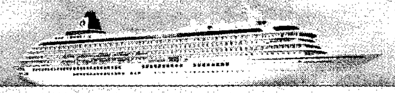

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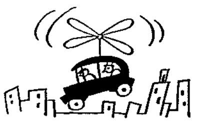
watchin' you like a hawk in the sky that fly and you were my prey boy I promise you if we keep bumpin' heads I know that one of these days we're gonna hook up probably talk on the phone but see I don't know if that's good I been holdin' back this secret from you."

Finally, at the end of the first hour of the Gaieties, the d.j. played a slow number: Aerosmith's "I Don't Want to Miss a Thing," from the soundtrack of the movie "Armageddon." A few brave boy-with-girl couples held each other loosely—very, very loosely—heads not quite touching, the boys' hands splayed gingerly over the girls' backs. Looking dreamy, they moved slowly and rhythmically in one-step, back and forth horizontally. The girl who had thought the anti-gum boy was mean stood on the sidelines, watching the couples and swaying empathetically. She looked charmed and forgiving.—LILLIAN ROSS

DEPT. OF MOTOR VEHICLES

Elegy for a parking space.



FOR thirteen years, I was part of the nomadic community of people who "garage" a car on the streets of Manhattan. The rhythms of parking shaped my days, my nights, and my weekends. Arriving at 10:30 A.M. on Monday to insure a spot when alternate-side parking began, at eleven, I'd sit in the car reading the paper, writing letters, or sharing information on the hard-to-predict movements of traffic cops with the other people who parked on my block. (Like salmon returning to their birth rivers, people who park on the street tend to be drawn to the same blocks.) A spot secured on Monday didn't actually have to be relinquished until Thursday, but to be sure of a Friday spot you had to move the car across the street on Tuesday. Extending a weekend on Long Island until Monday meant missing the chance for a Sunday-night spot—always iffy, but doable—and that meant, almost certainly, having to pay for a parking garage or settle for a meter, which would require leaving the house every hour to put quarters in it.

Of course, one could not actually use the car, once parked, except on weekends. Some might argue that the time and energy one invests in looking for free parking is worth more than the three hundred dollars or so a month it costs to keep a car in a parking garage. But for me parking on the street was worth it. I knew the sudden joy of spying that rectangle of heaven that I could lay claim to simply by having a car, and I knew the devastation of seeing the car right in front of me grab it. Parking for free made all the other usurious New York City expenses more bearable (such as the unincorporated-business tax, which is the penalty that the city makes the self-employed pay for not being a corporation). Even a fifty-five-dollar parking ticket is a lot easier to swallow when sweetened by the thought of what a monthly garage costs.

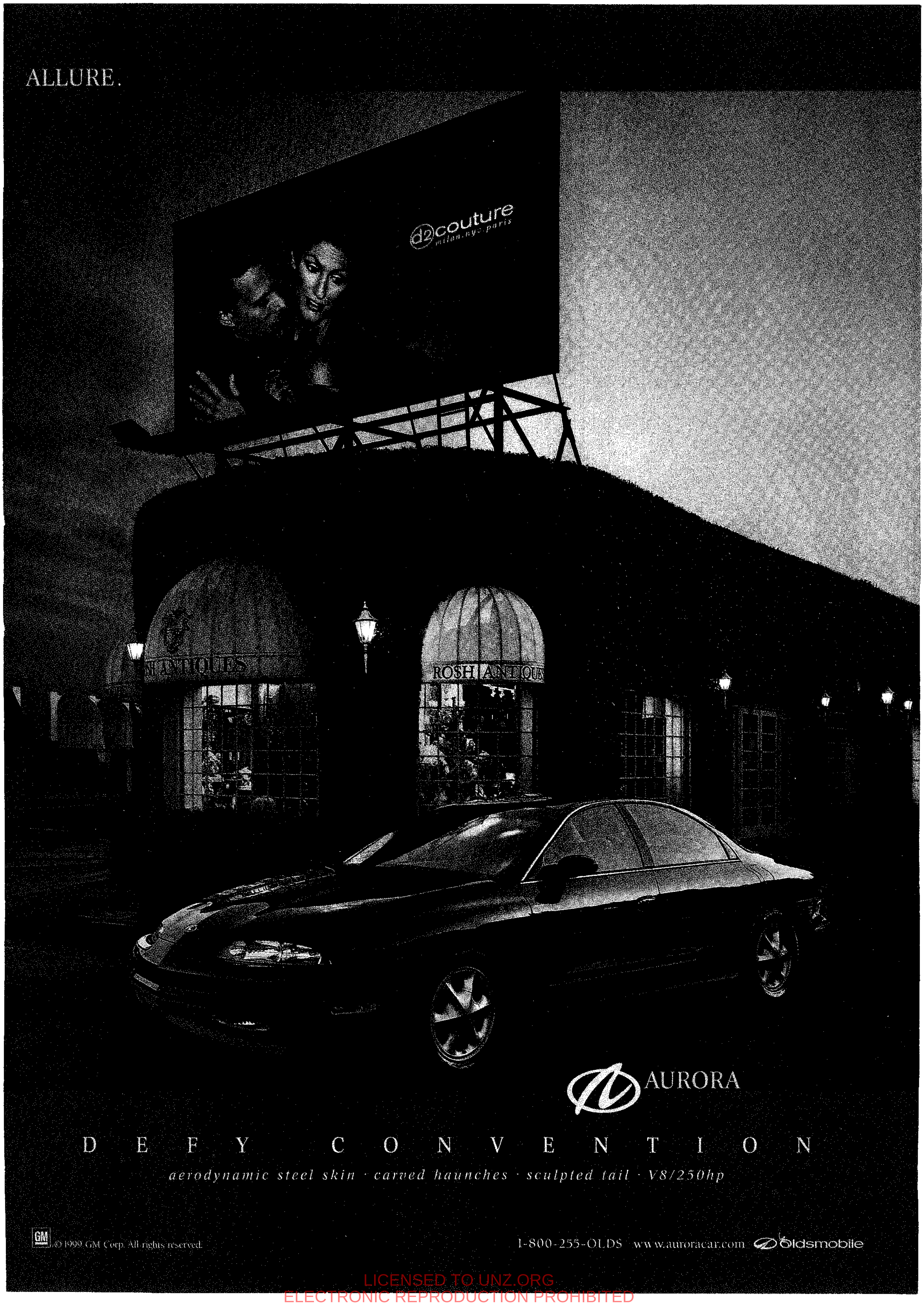
But life is what happens to you while you're busy looking for a parking space, as John Lennon sort of said. When my wife and I had a child, I convinced myself that it was time to upgrade to a more comfortable and reliable car than the 1987 Toyota Land Cruiser that I'd bought, with eighty thousand miles on it, in 1992. I felt we needed something that wouldn't give the kid Shaken Baby Syndrome simply driving down Greenwich Street.

Parking on the street had meant not having to worry about getting a new car. In order to discourage potential thieves, I kept my car as messy as possible—old newspapers, McDonald's wrappers, clumps of pennies gummed together with spilled Coke, empty bottles that rolled out from under the front seats when you hit the brakes. Whatever temporary loss of status I might have suffered by arriving in certain driveways in Connecticut in a semi-beater, I would regain when I informed people that I parked my car on the street. Out-of-towners, especially ex-New Yorkers, love to congratulate themselves on not having to pay three hundred dollars to park their cars, and finding out that I kept a car in the city for free was usually a blow. You mean you park on the street? And nothing happens to your car? Nope—well, nothing serious. In all the years that I garaged my car on the street, I got some dings and, once, lost a radio, but it was a crummy radio.

As I drove our new car, an Audi wagon, home from Zumbach, the dealer, to the expensive garage I would be parking it in, my perspective on New York City traffic changed drastically. Cabdrivers with whom I'd once gleefully jockeyed for position now seemed to be driving like madmen. Stay away from my car, I said out loud several times. After two days of driving in the city, it was a relief when we packed up for the recent holiday weekend and headed to New England. Only on crossing the Henry Hudson Bridge did I begin to unwind, and not until I arrived in the bucolic spaces of Vermont was I able to begin to enjoy owning a new car.

On the following morning, the warm winter sun was twinkling fiercely on my car's Santorin-blue mica finish. The snow on the roof of the house began to melt. "Usually roofs around here creep," a resident of the village later told me. "But this time they shot." A week's worth of heavy snow and ice came whizzing down, projected five or six feet away from the house, and landed directly on top of the car. The weight stove in the roof, put a "bird bath," as the body-shop guy called it, in the hood, and dented the car in other places. I had insured the car against the usual urban threats, theft and vandalism, but I hadn't thought about thawing snow falling off a roof in Vermont. I had a tense two-day wait for the insurance agent to open to find out if I was covered.

So now I have no car. It's back at Zumbach, getting a new roof. It turns out that I am insured, although I'm out the deductible and I'm paying the garage for space I can't use. I see beautiful parking spots around the neighborhood, but they no longer delight me. They mock me. —JOHN SEABROOK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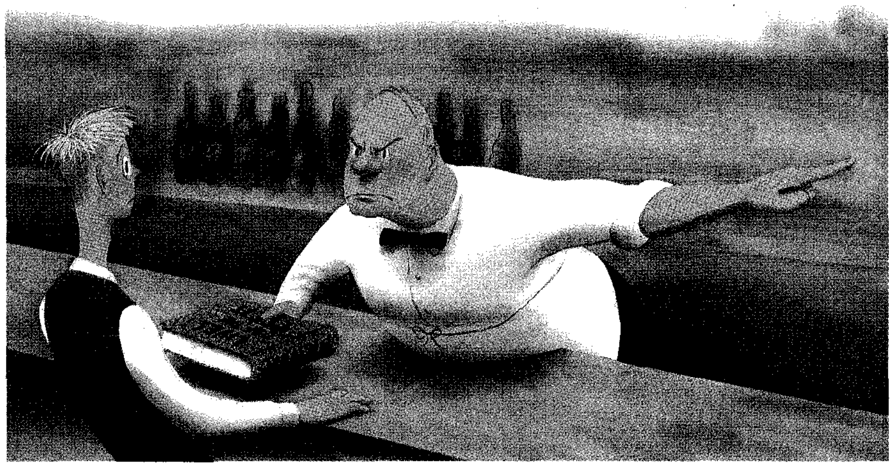
PERSONAL HISTORY

NEW IN TOWN

The initiation of a young Irishman.

BY FRANK McCOURT



"You may have 'The Lives of the Poets' under your oxter, but you don't have them in your head, so go home and read," Mr. Costello told the author.

IAN FALCONER

WHEN you're Irish and you don't know a soul in New York and you're walking along Third Avenue with trains rattling along on the El above, there's great comfort in discovering there's hardly a block without an Irish bar: Costello's, the Blarney Stone, the Blarney Rose, P. J. Clarke's, the Breffni, the Leitrim House, the Sligo House, Shannon's, Ireland's Thirty-Two, the All Ireland. I had my first pint in Limerick when I was sixteen and it made me sick, and my father nearly destroyed the family and himself with the drink, but I'm lonely in New York and I'm lured in by Bing Crosby on jukeboxes singing "Galway Bay" and blinking green shamrocks the likes of which you'd never see in Ireland.

There's an angry-looking man behind the bar in Costello's and he's saying to a customer, I don't give a tinker's damn if you have ten pee haitch dees. I know more about Samuel Johnson than you know about your hand and if you don't comport yourself properly you'll be out on the sidewalk. I'll say no more.

The customer says, But . . .

Out, says the angry man. Out. You'll get no more drink in this house.

The customer claps on his hat and stalks out and the angry man turns to me. And you, he says, are you eighteen?

I am, sir. I'm nineteen.

How do I know?

I have my passport, sir.

And what is an Irishman doing with an American passport?

I was born here, sir.

He allows me to have two fifteen-cent beers and tells me I'd be better off spending my time in the library than in bars like the rest of our miserable race. He tells me Dr. Johnson drank forty cups of tea a day and his mind was clear to the end. I ask him who Dr. Johnson was and he glares at me, takes my glass away, and tells me, Leave this bar. Walk west on Forty-second till you come to Fifth. You'll see two great stone lions. Walk up the steps between those two lions, get yourself a library card, and don't be an idiot like the rest of the bogtrotters getting off the boat and stupefying themselves with drink. Read your Johnson, read your Pope, and avoid the dreamy Micks. I want to ask him where he stands on Dostoyevsky, but he points at the door. Don't come back here till you've read "The Lives of the Poets." Go on. Get out.

It's a warm October day and I have nothing else to do but what I'm told and what harm is there in wandering up to Fifth Avenue where the lions are. The librarians are friendly. Of course I can have a library card, and it's so nice to see young immigrants using the library. I can borrow four books if I like as long as they're back on the due date. I ask if they have a book called "The Lives of the Poets," by Samuel Johnson, and they say, My, my, my, you're reading Johnson. I want to tell them I never read Johnson before, but I don't want them to stop admiring me. They tell me feel free to walk around, take a look at the Main Reading Room, on the third floor. They're not a bit like the librarians in Ireland, who stood guard and protected the books against the likes of me.

The sight of the Main Reading Room, North and South, makes me go weak at the knees. I don't know if it's the two beers I had or the excitement of my second day in New York, but I'm near tears when I look at the miles of shelves and know I'll never be able to read all those books if I live till the end of the century. There are acres of shiny tables where all sorts of people sit and read as long as they like, seven days a week, and no one bothers them unless they fall asleep and snore. There are sections with English, Irish, American books, literature, history, religion, and it makes me shiver to think I can come here anytime I like and read anything as long as I like if I don't snore.

I stroll back to Costello's with four books under my arm. I want to show the angry man I have "The Lives of the Poets," but he's not there. The barman says, That would be Mr. Tim Costello himself that was going on about Johnson, and as he's talking the angry man comes out of the kitchen. He says, Are you back already?

I have "The Lives of the Poets," Mr. Costello.

You may have "The Lives of the Poets" under your oxter, young fellow, but you don't have them in your head, so go home and read.

It's Thursday, and I have nothing to do till the job starts on Monday. For lack of a chair, I sit up in the bed in my furnished room and read till Mrs. Austin knocks on my door at eleven and tells me she's not a millionaire and it's house policy that lights be turned off at eleven to keep down her electricity bill. I turn off the light and lie on the bed listening to New York, people talking and laughing, and I wonder if I'll

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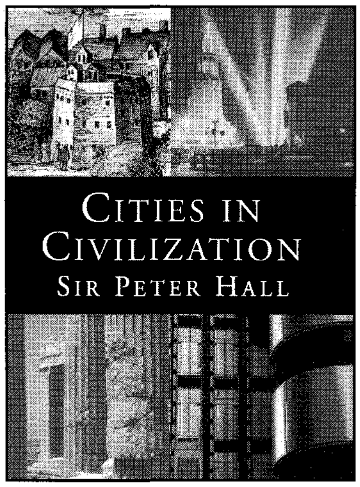

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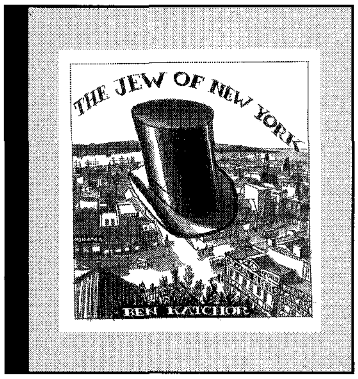

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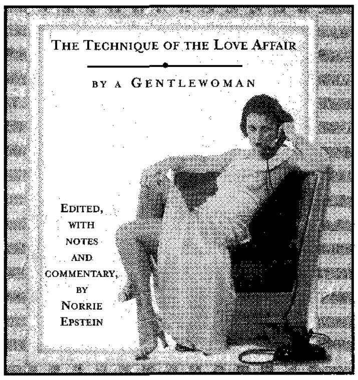
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BY A GENTLEWOMAN
EDITED, WITH NOTES AND COMMENTARY, BY NORRIE EPSTEIN

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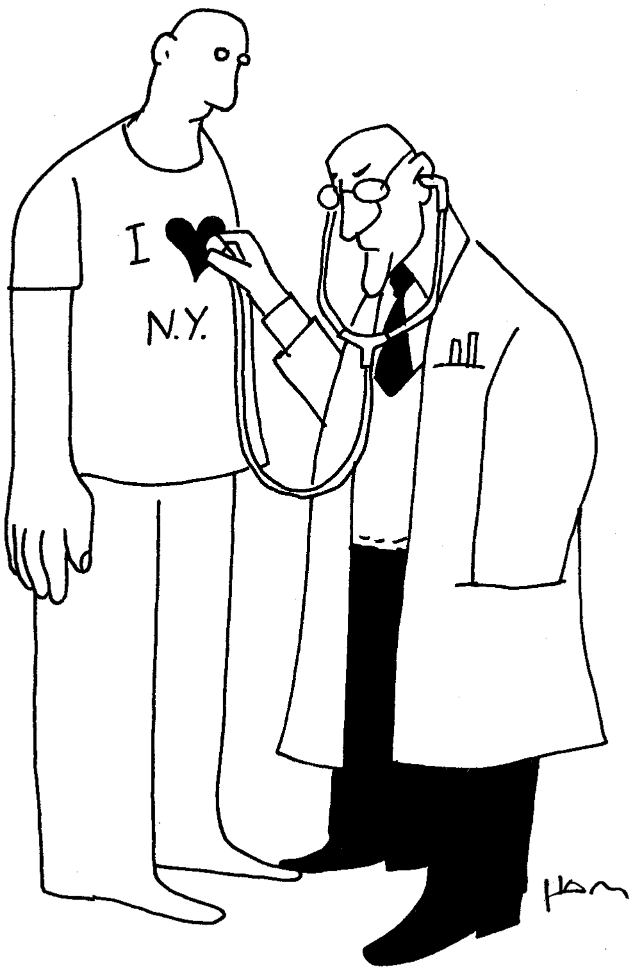


ever be part of the city, out there talking and laughing.

There's another knock at the door and this young man with red hair and an Irish accent tells me his name is Tom Clifford and would I like a fast beer because he works in an East Side building and he has to be there in an hour. No, he won't go to an Irish bar. He wants nothing to do with the Irish. So we walk to the Rheinland, on Eighty-sixth Street, where Tom tells me how he was born in America but was taken to Cork and got out as fast as he could by joining the American Army for three good years in Germany, when you could get laid ten times over for a carton of cigarettes or a pound of coffee. There's a dance floor and a band in the back of the Rheinland, and Tom asks a girl from one of the tables to dance. He tells me, Come on. Ask her friend to dance.

But I don't know how to dance, and I don't know how to ask a girl to dance. I know nothing about girls. How could I after growing up in Limerick? Tom asks the other girl to dance with me and she leads me out on the floor. I don't know what to do. Tom is stepping and twirling and I don't know whether to go backward or forward with this girl in my arms. She tells me I'm stepping on her shoes, and when I tell her I'm sorry she says, Oh, forget it. I don't feel like clumping around. She goes back to her table, and I follow her, with my face on fire. I don't know whether to sit at her table or go back to the bar till she says, You left your beer on the bar. I'm glad I have an excuse to leave her, because I wouldn't know what to say if I sat. I'm sure she wouldn't be interested if I told her I spent hours reading Johnson's "Lives of the Poets" or if I told her how excited I was at the Forty-second Street Library. I might have to find a book in the library on how to talk to girls, or I might have to ask Tom, who dances and laughs and has no trouble with the talk. He comes back to the bar and says he's going to call in sick, which means he's not going to work. The girl likes him and says she'll let him take her home. He whispers to me he might get laid, which means he might go to bed with her. The only problem is the other girl. He calls her my girl. Go ahead, he says. Ask her if you can take her home. Let's sit at their table and you can ask her.

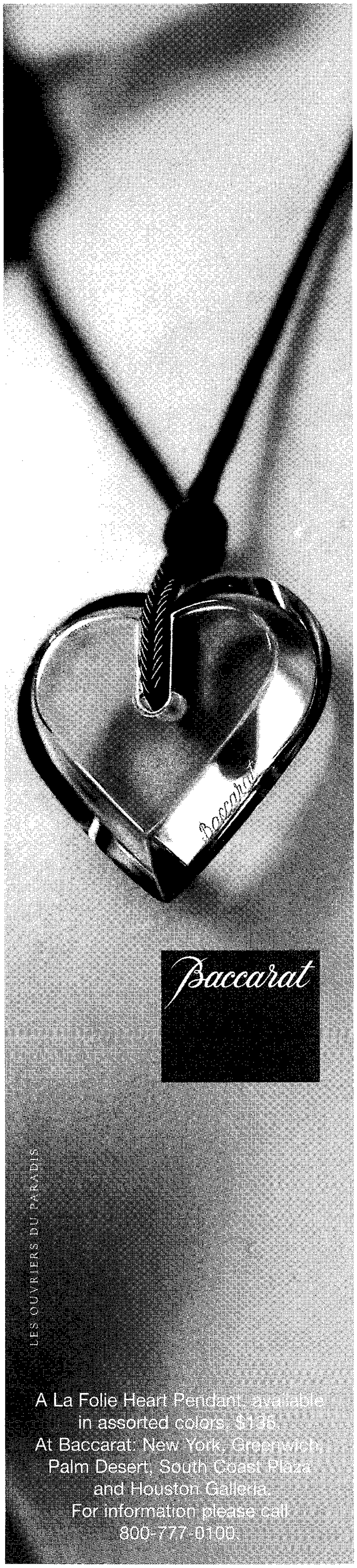
The beer is working on me and I'm feeling braver and I don't feel shy about sitting at the girls' table and telling them about Tim Costello and Dr. Samuel Johnson. Tom nudges me and whispers, For Christ's sake, stop the Samuel Johnson stuff, ask her home. When I look at her I see two, and I wonder which I should ask home, but if I look between the two I see one and that's the one I ask.

Home? she says. You kiddin' me. That's a laugh. I'm a secretary, a private secretary, and you don't even have a high-school diploma. I mean, did you look in the mirror lately? She laughs, and my face is on fire again. Tom takes a long drink of beer, and I know I'm useless with these girls, so I leave and walk down Third Avenue, taking the odd look at my reflection in shopwindows and giving up hope.

MONDAY morning my boss, Mr. Carey, tells me I'll be a houseman, a very important job where I'll be out front in the lobby dusting, sweeping, emptying ashtrays, and it's important because a hotel is judged by its lobby. He says we have the best lobby in the country. It's the Palm Court and known the world over. Anyone who's anyone knows about the Palm Court and the Biltmore clock. Chrissakes, it's right there in books and short stories, Scott Fitzgerald, people like that. Important people say, Let's meet under the clock at the Biltmore, and what happens if they come in and the place is covered with dust and buried in garbage. That's my job: to keep the Biltmore famous. I'm to clean and I'm not to talk to guests, not even look at them. If they talk to me I'm to say, Yes, sir or Ma'am, or No, sir or Ma'am, and keep working. He says I'm to be invisible, and that makes him laugh. Imagine that, eh, you're the invisible man cleaning the lobby. He says this is a big job and I'd never have it if I hadn't been sent by the Democratic Party at the request of the priest from California. Mr. Carey says the last guy on this job was fired for talking to college girls under the clock, but he was Italian so whaddya expect. He tells me keep my eye on the ball, don't forget to take a shower every day, this is America, stay sober, stick with your own kind of people, you can't go wrong with the Irish, go easy with the drink, and in a year you might rise to the rank of porter or busboy and make tips and, who knows, rise up to be a waiter and wouldn't that be the end of all your worries. He says anything is possible in America: Look at me, I have four suits.

The headwaiter in the lobby is called the maître d'. He tells me I'm to sweep up only what falls to the floor and I'm not to touch anything on the tables. If money falls to the floor or jewelry or anything like that I'm to hand it to him, the maître d' himself, and he'll decide what to do with it. If an ashtray is full, I'm to wait for a busboy or a waiter to tell me to empty it. Sometimes there are things in ashtrays that need to be taken care of. A woman might remove an earring because of the soreness and forget she left it in the ashtray, and there are earrings worth thousands of dollars, not that I'd know anything about that, just off the boat. It's the job of the maître d' to hold on to all earrings and return them to the women with the sore ears.

There are two waiters working in the lobby, and they rush back and forth, running into each other and barking in Greek. They tell me, You, Irish, come 'ere, clean up, clean up, empty goddam ashtray, take garbage, come on, come on, less go, you drunk or sompin'? They yell at me in front of the college students who swarm in on Thursdays and Fridays. I wouldn't mind Greeks yelling at me if they didn't do it in front of the college girls, who are golden. They toss their hair and smile with teeth you see only in America, white, perfect, and everyone has tanned movie-star legs. The boys sport crewcuts, the teeth, football shoulders, and they're easy with the girls. They talk and laugh, and the girls lift their glasses and smile at the boys with shining eyes. They might be my age, but I move among them ashamed of my uniform and my dustpan and broom. I wish I could be invisible, but I can't when the waiters yell at me in Greek and English and something in



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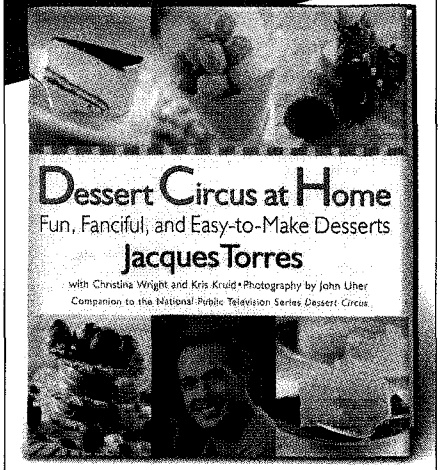
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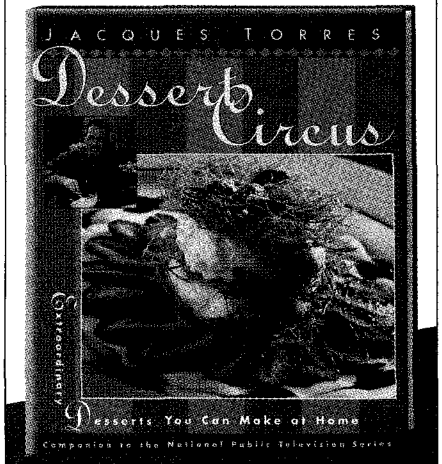
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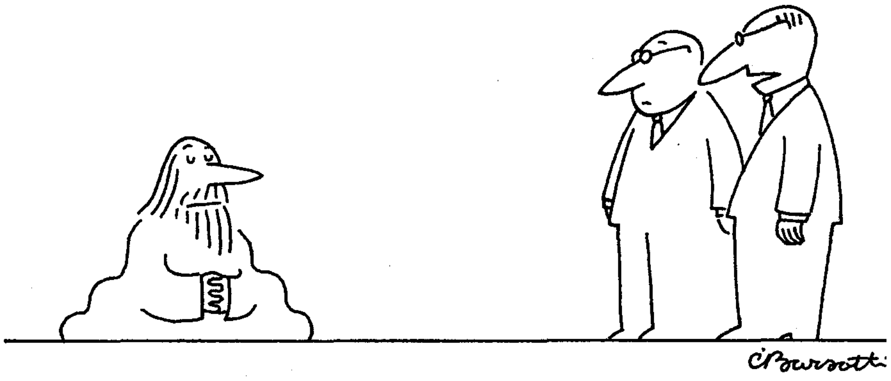
between or a busboy might accuse me of interfering with an ashtray that had something on it.

There are times when I don't know what to do or say. A college boy with a crewcut says, Do you mind not cleaning around here just now? I'm talking to the lady. If the girl looks at me and then looks away, I feel my face getting hot and I don't know why. Sometimes a college girl will smile at me and say, Hi, and I don't know what to say. I'm told by the hotel people above me I'm not to say a word to the guests, though I wouldn't know how to say Hi anyway because we never said it in Limerick, and if I said it I might be fired from my new job and be out on the street with no priest to get me another one. I'd like to say Hi and be part of that lovely world for a minute except that a crew-cut boy might think I was gawking at his girl and report me to the maître d'. I could go home tonight and sit up in the bed and practice smiling and saying Hi. If I kept at it, I'd surely be able to handle the Hi, but I'd have to say it without the smile for if I drew my lips back at all I'd frighten the wits out of the golden girls under the Biltmore clock.

There are days when the girls take off their coats and the way they look in sweaters and blouses is such an occasion of sin I have to lock myself in a toilet cubicle and interfere with myself and I have to be quiet for fear of being discovered by someone, a Puerto Rican busboy or a Greek waiter, who will run to the maître d' and report that the lobby houseman is dogfacing away in the bathroom.

THERE'S a poster outside the Sixty-eighth Street Playhouse that says " 'Hamlet,' with Laurence Olivier: Coming Next Week." I'm already planning to treat myself to a night out with a bottle of ginger ale and a lemon-meringue pie from the baker, like the one I had with the priest in Albany, the loveliest taste I ever had in my life. There I'll be watching Hamlet on the screen tormenting himself and everybody else, and I'll have tartness of ginger ale and sweetness of pie clashing away in my mouth. Before I go to the cinema, I can sit in my room and read "Hamlet" to make sure I know what they're all saying in that old English. The only book I brought from Ireland is the "Complete Works of Shakespeare," which I bought in O'Mahony's bookshop for thirteen shillings and sixpence, half my wages when I worked at the post office delivering telegrams. The play I like best is "Hamlet," because of what he had to put up with when his mother carried on with her husband's brother, Claudius, and the way my own mother in Limerick carried on with her cousin Laman Griffin. I could understand Hamlet raging at his mother the way I did with my mother the night I had my first pint and went home drunk and slapped her face. I'll be sorry for that till the day I die, though I'd still like to go back to Limerick someday and find Laman Griffin in a pub and tell him step outside, and I'd wipe the floor with him till he begged for mercy. I know it's useless talking like that because Laman Griffin will surer be dead of the drink and the consumption by the time I return to Limerick, and he'll be a long time in Hell before I ever say a prayer or light a candle for him, even if Our Lord says we should forgive our enemies and turn the other cheek. No, even if Our Lord came back on earth and ordered me to forgive Laman Griffin on pain of being cast into the sea with a millstone around my neck, the thing I fear most in the world, I'd have to say,



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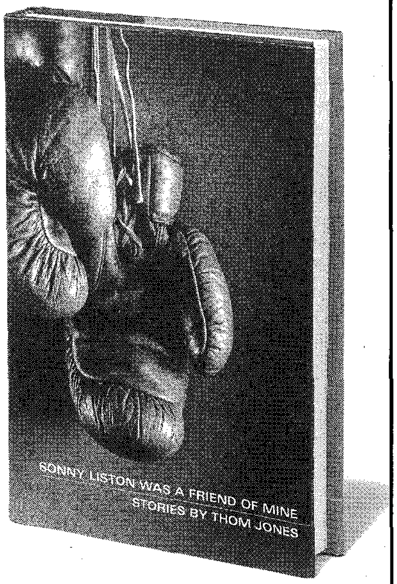

THOM JONES
SONNY LISTON WAS A FRIEND OF MINE

As seen in THE NEW YORKER
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Sorry, Our Lord, I can never forgive that man for what he did to my mother and my family. Hamlet didn't wander around Elsinore forgiving people in a made-up story, so why should I in real life?

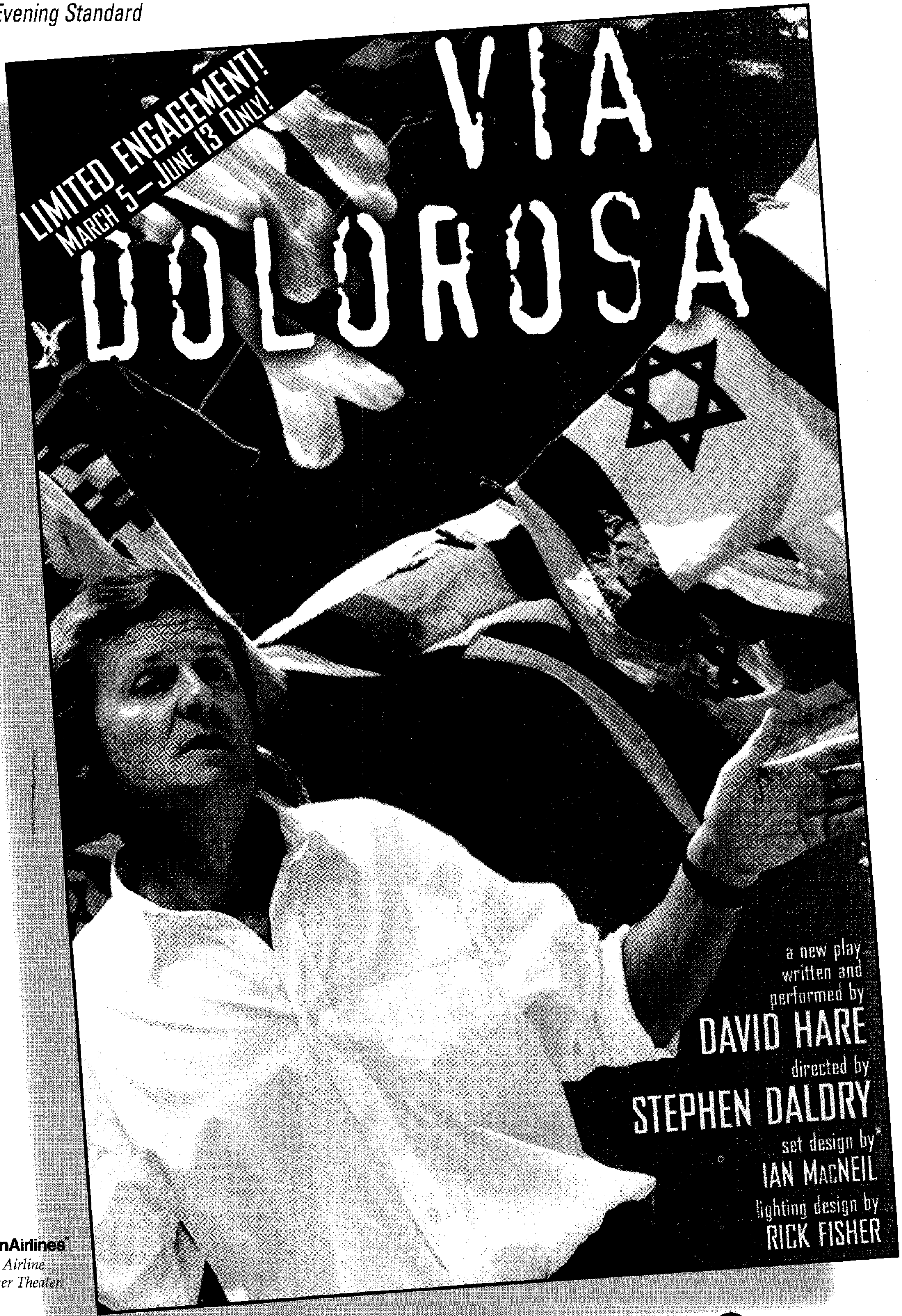
The last time I went to the Sixty-eighth Street Playhouse, the usher wouldn't let me in with a bar of Hershey's chocolate in my hand. He said I couldn't bring in food or drink, and I'd have to consume it outside. Consume. He couldn't say "eat," and that's one of the things that bothers me in the world, the way ushers and people in uniforms in general always like to use big words. The Sixty-eighth Street Playhouse isn't a bit like the Lyric Cinema in Limerick, where you could bring in fish and chips or a good feed of pig's feet and a bottle of stout if the humor was on you. The night they wouldn't let me in with the chocolate bar, I had to stand outside and gobble it with the usher glaring at me, and he didn't care that I was missing funny parts of the Marx Brothers. Now I have to carry my black raincoat from Ireland over my arm so that the usher won't spot the bag with the lemon-meringue pie or the ginger-ale bottle stuck in a pocket.

The minute the film starts, I try to go at my pie, but the box crackles and people say, Shush, we're trying to watch this film. I know they're not the ordinary type of people who go to gangster films or musicals. These are people who probably graduated from college and live on Park Avenue and know every line of "Hamlet." They'll never say they go to movies, only films. I'll never be able to open the box silently, and my mouth is watering with the hunger and I don't know what to do till a man sitting next to me says, Hi, slips part of his raincoat over my lap, and lets his hand wander under it. He says Am I disturbing you? and I don't know what to say though something tells me take my pie and move away. I tell him, Excuse me, and go by him up the aisle and out to the men's lavatory, where I'm able to open my pie box in comfort without Park Avenue shushing me. I feel sorry over missing part of "Hamlet," but all they were doing up there on the screen was jumping around and shouting about a ghost.

Even though the men's lavatory is empty, I don't want to be seen opening my box and eating my pie, so I sit on the toilet in a cubicle eating quickly so that I can get back to "Hamlet," as long as I don't have to sit beside the man with the coat on his lap and the wandering hand. The pie makes my mouth dry and I think I'll have a nice drink of ginger ale till I realize you have to have some class of a church key to lift off the cap. There's no use going to one of the ushers because they're always barking and telling people they're not supposed to be bringing in food or drink from the outside even if they're from Park Avenue. I lay the pie box on the floor and decide the only way to knock the cap off the ginger-ale bottle is to place it against the sink and give it a good rap with the back of my hand, and when I do the neck of the bottle breaks and the ginger ale gushes up in my face and there's blood on the sink where I cut my hand on the bottle and I feel sad with all the things happening to me that my pie is being drowned on the floor with blood and ginger ale and wondering at the same time will I ever be able to see "Hamlet" with all the troubles I'm having when a desperate-looking gray-haired man rushes in nearly knocking me over and steps on my pie box destroying it entirely. He stands at the urinal firing away, trying to shake the box off his shoe, and barking at me, Goddam, goddam, what the hell, what the hell. He stands away and swings his leg so that the pie box flies off his shoe and hits the wall all squashed and beyond eating. The man says What the hell is going on here? and I don't know what to tell him because it seems like a long story going all the way back to how excited I was weeks ago about coming to see "Hamlet" and how I didn't eat all day because I had a delicious feeling about doing everything at the same time, eating my pie, drinking ginger ale, seeing "Hamlet," and hearing all the glorious speeches. I don't think the man is in the mood from the way he dances from one foot to the other telling me the toilet is not a goddam restaurant, that I have no goddam business hanging around

"A THEATRICAL COUP!"

—*The Evening Standard*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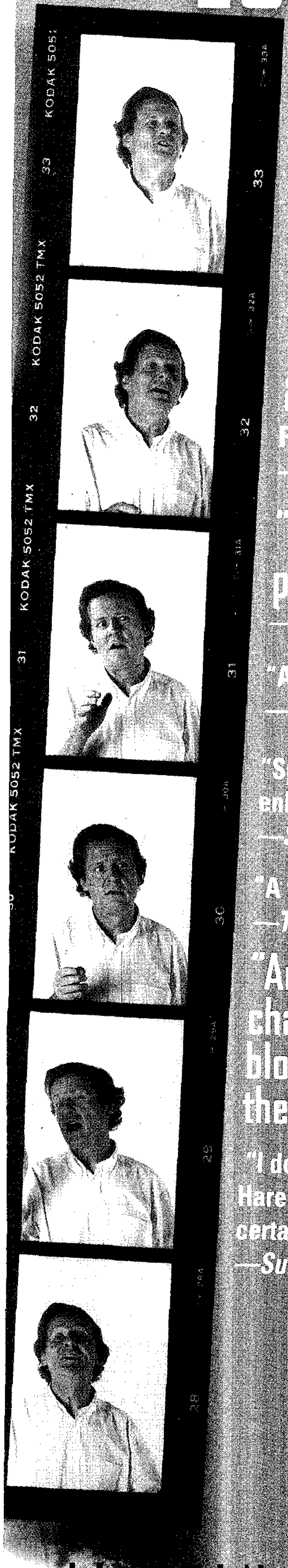

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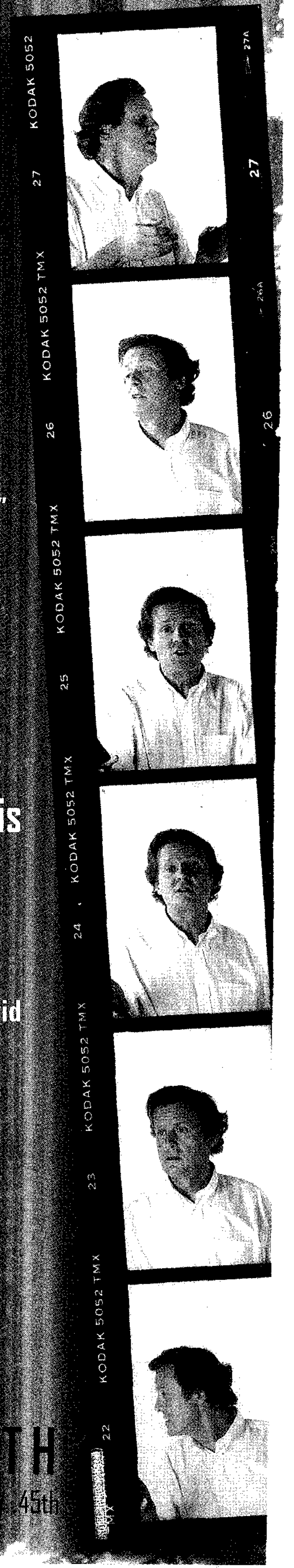

VIA DOLOROSA

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Call Telecharge Today: 212 239 6200 (Outside NY, NJ, CT 1 800 432 7250) Groups: 212 889 4300 222 W. 45th public bathrooms eating and drinking and I'd better get my ass outa there. I tell him I had an accident trying to open the ginger-ale bottle and he says, Didn't you ever hear of an opener or are you just off the goddam boat? He leaves the lavatory and just as I'm wrapping toilet paper around my cut the usher comes in and says there's a customer complaint about my behavior in here. He's like the gray-haired man with his goddam and what the hell and when I try to explain what happened he says, Get your ass outa here. I tell him I paid to see "Hamlet" and I came in here so that I wouldn't be disturbing all the Park Avenue people around me who know "Hamlet" backward and forward, but he says, I don't give a shit, get out before I call the manager, or the cops, who will surely be interested in the blood all over the place.

Then he points to my black raincoat draped on the sink. Take that goddam raincoat outa here. Whaddya doin' with a raincoat on a day there ain't a cloud in the sky? We know the raincoat trick and we're watching. We know the whole raincoat brigade. We're on to your little queer games. You sit there lookin' innocent and the next thing the hand is wandering over to innocent kids. So get your raincoat outa here, buddy, before I call the cops, you goddam pervert.

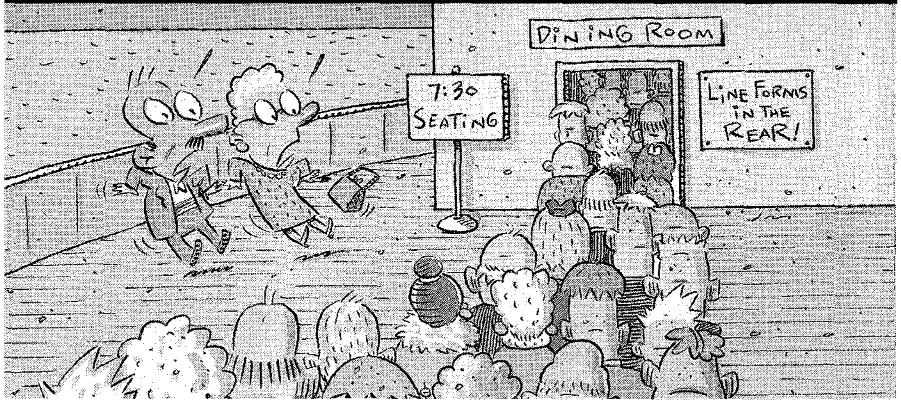
I take the broken ginger-ale bottle with the drop left and walk down Sixty-eighth Street and sit on the steps of my rooming house till Mrs. Austin calls through the basement window there is to be no eating or drinking on the steps, cockroaches will come running from all over and people will say we're a bunch of Puerto Ricans who don't care where they eat or drink or sleep.

There is no place to sit anywhere along the street with landladies peering and watching and there is nothing to do but to wander over to a park by the East River and wonder why America is so hard and complicated that I have trouble going to see "Hamlet" with a lemon-meringue pie and a bottle of ginger ale. ◆

DEPT. OF INCREASING RETURNS

[*From the Times*]

Solo, a restaurant at 661 Willets Path in Hauppauge, is, as a result of the departure of a partner, changing its name to Duo.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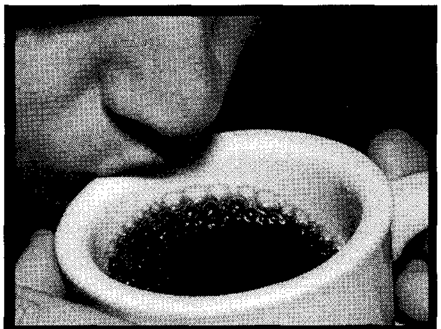
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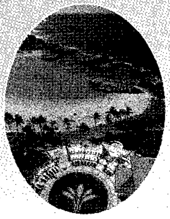

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AROUND CITY HALL

LIGHTEN UP

Why is the Mayor still picking fights?

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT

IT is almost impossible to write about Mayor Rudy Giuliani these days without being unfair to him. The important story of his tenure is obviously the one about the city's recovery, which some new statistic confirms just about every week—and which becomes, with each new confirmation, that much less newsworthy. Good news is like that, especially in New York, where it is more or less accepted that a "shocking" story of a mouse raiding a doughnut shop will make the front page three days running.

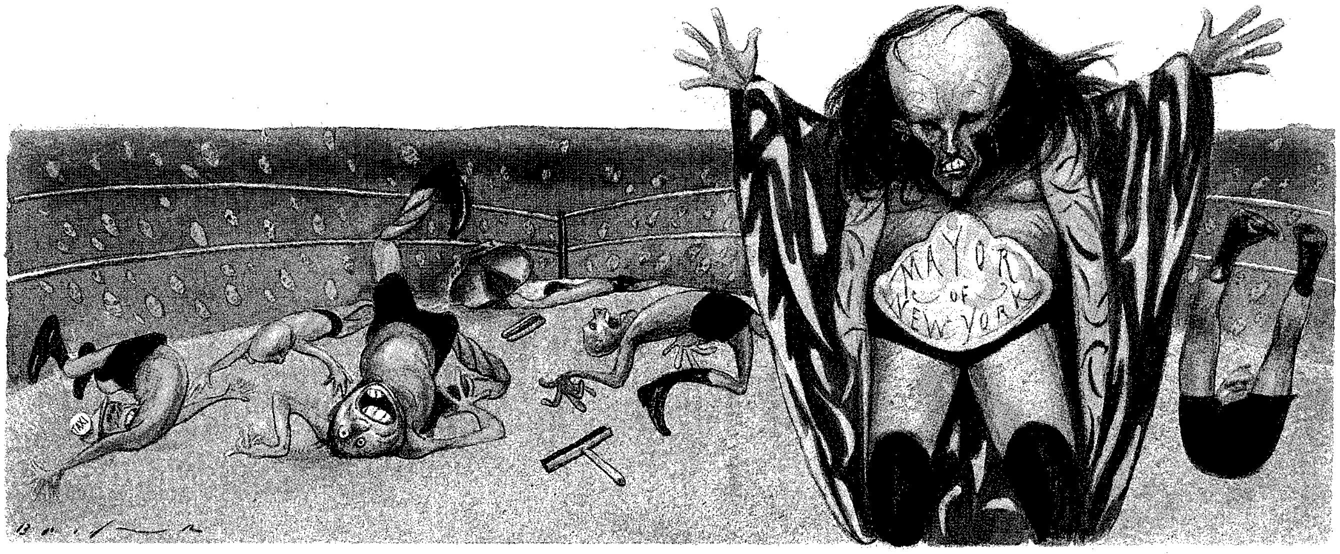
In recent weeks, reporters could have picked up on any number of upbeat events in the city. Reuters broke ground on its new thirty-story headquarters in Times Square, and a few days later the Ritz-Carlton announced that it was planning to build a two-hundred-and-fifty-room luxury hotel downtown. The Mayor's office released figures showing that feature-film shooting in the city had almost tripled in the last five years. When the city's murder statistics for 1998 were tallied up, they showed that New York was the safest it's been since 1964, and when the welfare rolls were totalled they were lower than at any time since 1967. These facts were duly noted, but usually in a pro-forma, inside-the-Metro-Section way.

Meanwhile, the running stories out of City Hall have centered mainly on the Mayor's many feuds and self-defeating machinations. The press is naturally on the lookout for conflict, and the Mayor, particularly in his second term, has been more than obliging—routinely overreacting in a way that has helped turn small stories into big ones. Since his resounding reëlection, in November of 1997, Giuliani has taken *New York* magazine to federal court over a harmless joke made at his expense, driven the Grammys out of the city because of foul language purportedly directed at one of his aides, and called out police helicopters to stymie a demonstration by disgruntled cabbies. His administration has engaged in numerous protracted court battles to keep other elected officials from examining city records, banned demonstrations from the steps of City Hall, initiated a crackdown on hot-dog venders, and tried to stamp out jaywalking. More recently, Giuliani revived his public feud with Ed Koch by imitating the former Mayor's high-pitched nasal voice and accusing him of running "the most corrupt administration in the last half of the twentieth century." He also lashed out at Virginia officials who sought to impose limits on the import of trash, articulating his view that the Old Dominion's contribution to art and culture consisted mainly of accepting the city's coffee grounds. And this is not even counting the more traditional tensions between the Mayor and the Governor, which have lately become as open, and as bizarre, as at any time in recent memory.

That each new squabble seems only to confirm the last does not in any way detract from its appeal, nor does the fact that many are fought over entirely hypothetical issues: stadiums that *might* be built; information that *might* be misused; casinos that *might* be constructed *if* gambling should ever be made legal in New York. And that these episodes have been edging out what everyone knows to be the more significant news tends, in a perverse way, to give them added interest. The Mayor may be genuinely engaged in a fight against chaos and disorder, but too often the better story by far has come to be the chaos and disorder of the Mayor's fighting.

Perhaps the most instructive example is Giuliani's recent battle with Brooklyn's City Councilman Stephen DiBrienza. The Democratic councilman had angered the Mayor by sponsoring a bill whose aim was to improve the city's treatment of the homeless. In response, Giuliani announced that he planned to put a new shelter in the middle of Di-

Brienza's district, in Cobble Hill. By most accounts, there was no need for an additional shelter in that neighborhood or in any other, and, in an unusually candid admission from an elected official, the Mayor made it clear that the Cobble Hill site had been chosen expressly to irk DiBrienza. But what gave the story its final, irresistible twist was that, to secure the site, the Mayor was prepared to displace a popular parenting center and a clinic serving five hundred mentally ill New Yorkers. The prospect that psychiatric patients would go without their medication so that Giuliani could settle a grudge was to the press like asbestos to a trial lawyer: the perfect excuse to take umbrage. At the height of the controversy, the cover of the *Village Voice* declared the Mayor a "heartless bastard." In the *News*, Koch pictured Giuliani as a young boy tearing the wings off a fly. Bob Herbert, in his column in the *Times*, described the Mayor's tactics as "carefully and cruelly crafted"—in other words, "just 'Rudy being Rudy.' "



The pressures of the job have turned many mayors into political pugilists, but none have taken to the ring more eagerly than Giuliani.

STEVE BRODNER

ONE of the many occupational hazards of the mayoralty is to be chronically under attack. As Mayor William O'Dwyer told this magazine in 1946, "The criticism, the carping—that's all part of the game." In the same interview, O'Dwyer described a reception at the Waldorf-Astoria, where a woman, almost certainly an out-of-towner, asked him, "Oh, my, what do I do when I meet the Mayor of the City of New York? Do I kiss his ring, or what?" O'Dwyer replied, "In New York, lady, you heave a cuspidor at him."

The job description virtually guarantees abuse. Although the city is more populous than any one of thirty-nine states, and has a budget larger than that of forty-five, in many ways its mayor's duties are just like those facing the supervisor of some two-stoplight town. Along with setting broad policy goals and managing the city's Byzantine finances, the mayor is expected to make sure that the schools are safe, the garbage picked up, the streets cleaned, the park benches repaired, the stray animals cared for, and the potholes filled. "If a sparrow dies of a heart attack in Central Park, I'm responsible," Koch once said, only half in jest.

Giuliani's idol, Fiorello LaGuardia, grew so irascible during his three terms in office, according to his biographer Thomas Kessner, that he regularly threw tantrums. He once grabbed a reporter's notebook, tossed it on the floor, and jumped up and down on it. On another occasion, a reporter was scratched in the face when LaGuardia slammed a car door on him. When O'Dwyer was elected to succeed him, he later recalled, LaGuardia welcomed him to City Hall by pointing to the mayor's desk and shrieking, "Sit down in that chair! Now you'll have a perpetual headache."

Anyone who followed Giuliani's career as a federal prosecutor could have guessed, broadly speaking, how he would react to the pressures of the mayor's job. In the nineteen-eighties, when he was pursuing mobsters and insider traders as the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, he was well known for his pugnacity and his willingness to make enemies. This combativeness clearly contributed to his narrow victory over Mayor David Dinkins, in 1993. At the time, the city was struggling to make sense of the stabbing death of Yankel Rosenbaum and the Crown Heights riots; Giuliani made it known that as mayor he would not shrink from confronting social disorder, even at the risk of alienating some of his own constituents. When he ran for reëlection, in 1997, in many ways the city was in better shape than it had been in quite some time, and Giuliani argued convincingly that this was a result of his uncompromising position on everything from squeegee men to porn shops.

But if Giuliani's over-the-top aggressiveness is, in some sense, job-related it is not fully explained by the stress. Just when one begins to wonder whether the Mayor, like LaGuardia, has been driven to the edge, he will suddenly demonstrate self-control. And the bigger the crisis, the calmer he becomes.

SHORTLY before 1 A.M. on February 4th, four New York City police officers gunned down a West African immigrant named Amadou Diallo, firing forty-one bullets at the unarmed man as he stood in the doorway of his building. The incident was the stuff of a mayor's nightmares, and for Giuliani it was particularly threatening. His critics have always argued that his successes have come at too high a price: the drop in the welfare rolls, for example, at the cost of poor children being denied benefits, and the drop in crime at the cost of increased police brutality. Rightly or wrongly, the Diallo shooting was easily interpreted in these terms. Within days, demonstrators were gathering in lower Manhattan carrying signs that read "Giuliani Police State."

The Mayor has faced such crises before. In 1997, when Abner Louima was brutally beaten and sodomized at a police station in Brooklyn, there was a real danger that the incident, which occurred just three months before the mayoral election, would become Giuliani's own Crown Heights. But the Mayor quickly met with Louima in the hospital and with his family members at their church, and had his police commissioner announce a reorganization of the entire precinct. The incident barely became an issue in the campaign.

In the aftermath of the Diallo shooting, the Mayor faced strong criticism, not just from professional protestors like the Reverend Al Sharpton but also from prominent African-American officials like Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields. The criticism this time focussed not so much on the shooting itself as on his treatment of the city's African-American residents. In a particularly damning gesture, the mother of the slain man, Kadiadou Diallo, who had come to New York to retrieve his body, refused the Mayor's offer of financial assistance, saying that she preferred to be aided by relatives and other African immigrants. Such is the mistrust that Giuliani has engendered over the years that even his gestures of sympathy are greeted with suspicion.

At his press conferences on the incident, the Mayor kept trying to emphasize that the New York Police Department was actually less likely to use force than most other big-city departments. "This individual incident is of great concern," he said when he was questioned about it at the Museum of the City of New York. "And it's one that should be investigated very thoroughly. But it would be very unfair to jump from this incident to accuse an entire police department and to take away from the credit they deserve for being just about the most restrained police department in the country." To many, this was an unsatisfactory response. Still, Giuliani did demonstrate, once again, that he can remain cool even in the face of considerable provocation.

"Nothing. I just called to say I found a working pay phone."

The Mayor's many fights are not, finally, the product of a short temper or an impulsive nature—and that, perhaps, is what is most fascinating about them. Until fairly recently, one might even have argued that Giuliani's aggression was strategic, designed to make those who considered crossing him think again before doing so. But as the targets of his wrath have become punier, and the coverage of his constant scrapping more harsh, it is increasingly difficult to maintain that his intransigence is serving any identifiable political purpose.

Consider, for example, his recent dispute with Father Joseph O'Hare, the chairman of the city's Campaign Finance Board. It is almost too arcane for any but the most hardened political junkie to follow, centering on a question of whether a ballot proposition approved by voters in November, 1998, trumps a package of campaign-finance reforms passed by the City Council earlier last year. Father O'Hare, who is himself a mayoral appointee, disagrees with Giuliani on this matter, and as a result the Mayor has tried to cut the board's funding, accused its members of "stubbornness and arrogance," declared its actions illegal, and threatened to move its offices, now in lower Manhattan, all the way out to Brooklyn.

What makes the battle truly Giulianiesque, though, is that it began as

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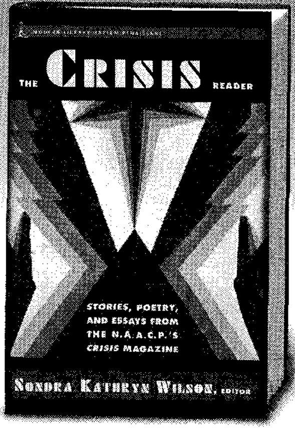
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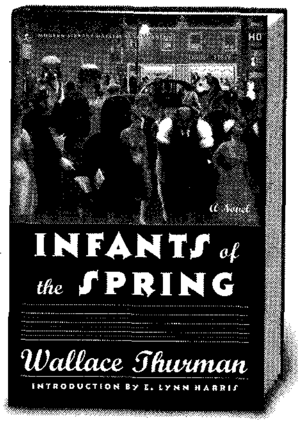

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a disagreement over a baseball stadium. From the beginning, the Mayor's scheme to relocate the Yankees from the Bronx to the far west side of Manhattan was implausible and had virtually no public support. Yet the Mayor refused to let it drop. When the City Council Speaker, Peter Vallone, demanded a referendum on the matter, the Mayor blocked it by appointing a commission to revise the city charter. The charter commission is what brought him into conflict with the Campaign Finance Board, and although the origins of the fight have been all but forgotten, even by many involved in it, the Mayor still will not back down. At some point in his tenure, he seems to have made a vow to never, ever give up—an attitude that may be inspiring in the midst of a blitzkrieg but that can start to seem pretty absurd when the enemy is an obscure municipal agency.

To the extent that Giuliani has acknowledged his combativeness as an issue, it has been to dismiss it categorically. In December, at his year-end press conference, he recited a long list of impressive statistics about New York's progress, but what got the most coverage was his reaction to the question "Was it right to characterize his administration as 'leaner and meaner'?"

"I think that is an insulting question," the Mayor said. "Happy New Year. That's been a perception from the very beginning. It's something that you keep writing, and I really don't give a darn. I'm doing my job, I'm doing it as well as I can do it.... If people like my personality, thank you. If you don't, I really don't care."

The Mayor's remark was portrayed as another demonstration of his belligerence. But it was really no different, except perhaps in degree, from what Giuliani says all the time: he's tough because that's what it takes, and he's been successful because he hasn't been cowed by the "limousine liberals," the "politically correct," the "yellers and screamers." As he put it in his State of the City address last month, "Most of what we've accomplished are things that people thought we couldn't do."

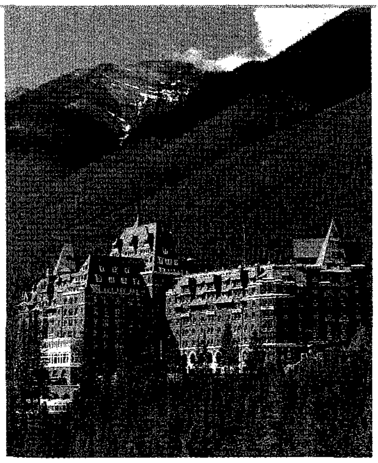
In Giuliani's case, this is not merely a politician's empty self-praise. In taking on the city's sex shops, in reversing decades of welfare policy, and in insisting that crime is not an immutable feature of New York life, the Mayor has challenged what many thought were basic urban realities. And during his tenure New York has regained much of the swagger and self-confidence that not very long ago it seemed permanently to have lost.

By now, it is well known that Giuliani ascribes to the "broken windows" theory of civic disorder. As the social theorists James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling described it seventeen years ago, the sense of neglect conveyed by a single broken window can encourage more broken windows and set off a dynamic that leads an entire neighborhood toward lawlessness. The theory, with its implication that extreme measures may be necessary against even minor infractions, provides a strong justification for Giuliani's style of government. If, as mayor, he has sometimes appeared overzealous in his attempts to right even the smallest of wrongs, perhaps it is because he is convinced that these wrongs are more consequential than they appear. Let DiBrienza and his fellow Council members get away with setting city policy and who knows where it will all end.

Of course, one can also see in Giuliani's attraction to the broken-windows theory an effort to justify what is, finally, his own solution to the problem of being mayor—social theory marshalled in defense of personal impulses. Either way, though, the essential story of Giuliani's mayoralty gets tangled up with his many more entertaining misadventures.

There are a little less than three years left to Giuliani's second, and final, term. If, as is widely expected, he decides to run for the United States Senate, he will have to embark on that campaign about a year from now. Not much time remains, then, for him to secure his legacy as mayor, and despite his successes the city obviously still has pressing problems: decrepit schools, a troubled foster-care system, and uneasy race relations. It would be good for the Mayor's image, and no doubt good for the city, if these were the issues he was seen to be engaging. At the same time, it is only fair to acknowledge that his achievements are at least in part due to his willingness to dismiss, almost out of hand, what his critics think. ◆

CANADIAN ROCKIES



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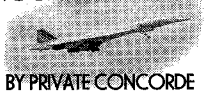

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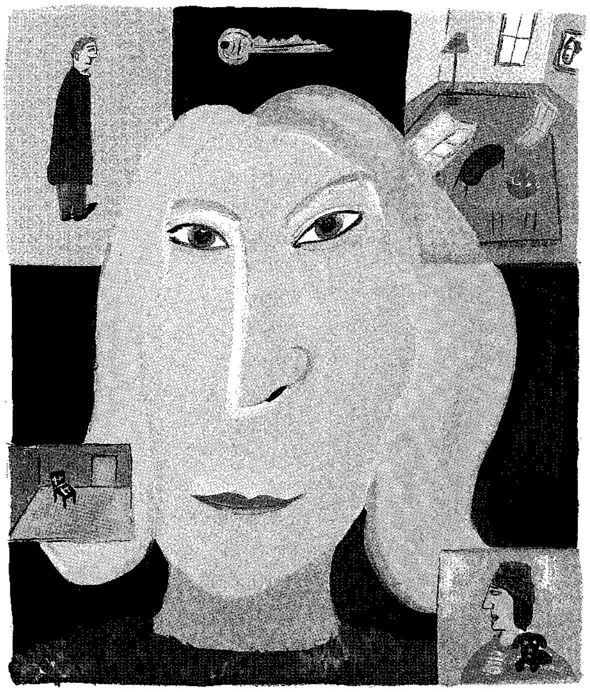
Scenes from a broker's life.

BY SUSAN ORLEAN



She worried over her customers' psychic real estate as well as over their real real estate.

MAIRA KALMAN

JILL MEILUS is a New York City real-estate broker. Like Superman, she can see through walls. Walking down a Manhattan street with her is a paranormal experience. "Nice building," you might remark as you pass a handsome but unrevealing prewar façade, to which she might respond that the J-line apartment on the third floor has a new kitchen, that the guy in 8-A is being transferred to Florida and will entertain any offers of more than two hundred thousand dollars, that the super is a chain-smoker, that there is a one-bedroom for sale because the owners are having money troubles or are having twins or made a new fortune or are splitting up. New York is the big showoff of American cities, yet its residential life is almost invisible to the ordinary passerby. Even so, you cannot hide from a real-estate broker. The other day, Jill took one of her customers to view a SoHo loft—a nice, six-hundred-and-fifty-thousand-dollar sort of place, with a lot of windows and chintz upholstery and silver gizmos artfully scattered around. Jill's customer, a television actress, whom I will call Vivian, liked the loft, so she paced off the dimensions and counted the closets, and eventually came upon a locked door beside the kitchen. She told Jill that she wanted to see what was behind it; after all, the price of the loft could be calculated per square inch, let alone square foot, and behind the door were a few of those high-priced inches. Jill considered the request and then sighed. "Vivian, I wish I could show it to you, but I can't," she said. "The owners of the loft are sadomasochists, and that is their dungeon." "Oh," Vivian said. She looked disappointed. After a moment, Jill brightened. "I know that it'd be a great space for a second bathroom," she added, "and the owners do promise to remove the dungeon fixtures as a condition of sale."

The total value of all privately owned apartments in Manhattan is estimated to be $102.7 billion, and about seven per cent of those apartments turn over every year. In 1998, for instance, the combined sales of all coöperative and condominium units came to $7.9 billion. Many of those units are one-bedroom starter apartments, but some are larger, and a few are a lot larger. Last year, the company that Jill works for, the Corcoran Group, sold a pretty big place on Central Park West to Ian Schrager for nine million dollars, and recently another brokerage had almost closed a deal for a twenty-two-million-dollar apartment that occupies the top three

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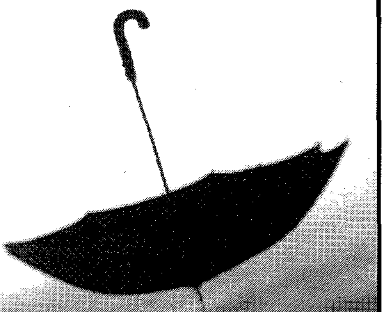

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MR. X

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from other people, like the Identi-Kits
that victims piece together with the police.
The felon is memory, which takes a face
and slices up what once was very simple.

People you loved, the waiter you saw every week
without seeing, arresting strangers reassemble
years later in other faces and belong
equally well there, as if they were unique,
and innocent of how they make you tremble
with remembering or forgetting. I was wrong,

Mr. X—whose cheekbones I recall
from somewhere, and that funny, slightly cross-
eyed, quizzical look you gave me on the sole
occasion we met—to assume you'd lost
someone who looked like me. And yet I stared
longingly at you, as you disappeared.

—MARY JO SALTER

floors of the Pierre Hotel, and is being purchased by a Wall Street analyst with a rather pessimistic view of the stock market. The Corcoran Group handles twenty per cent of the sales of New York residential real estate. There are about four hundred Corcoran Group brokers, making it the second-largest brokerage in the city—smaller than Douglas Elliman and bigger than the three other major brokerages, Brown Harris Stevens, Halstead Property, and Bellmarc Realty. These are good days to be a real-estate broker in New York. Because prices are so high and the volume of sales is so large, brokers in New York are making more than their counterparts in other big, expensive cities, like Houston and Los Angeles. The top broker in New York earned close to two million dollars last year, and a typical broker is making sixty thousand and has no trouble finding people who want to sell and people who want to buy.

When I first met Jill, she had just got a new exclusive, a

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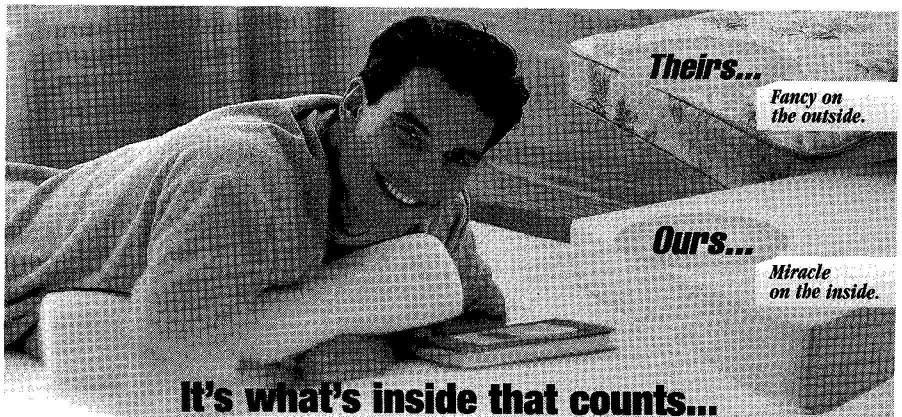
It was actually a cheery but bantam two-bedroom co-op on West Eleventh Street, in Greenwich Village, which another Corcoran broker had sold to a young investment banker two years ago for a hundred and sixty thousand dollars. The banker was getting married and moving to Texas. As the apartment's exclusive agent, Jill was handling all the advertising and marketing. Although any broker from any company could show the apartment to customers, Jill had to be present at all showings, and she would split the commission with the eventual buyer's broker. In effect, she was the seller's representative. She would keep the entire commission if she happened to sell one of her exclusives to one of her own customers, because then she would be representing both the seller and the buyer. Everywhere else in the country, brokers typically share listings and can show a house at any time, by themselves, because keys are usually left in a lockbox outside the house which any broker can gain access to. The New York City system is very New York-like: complicated, arcane, and logistically nightmarish. Not only do brokers have to be available to show their exclusives to other brokers and their customers but they also have to be able to take customers to see apartments on the market which other brokers are handling, and this means they have to arrange with those other brokers to see their exclusives. At the moment, Jill had two apartments that were her exclusives, and about a dozen customers who were actively looking to buy, with price limits ranging from around a hundred and sixty thousand dollars to just under two million.

Jill is chestnut-haired, self-effacing, midsize, and fortyish. She specializes in downtown real estate and has a lot of artists and writers and architects as customers, which means she goes to work wearing big, hairy sweaters and stretch pants rather than an uptown broker's wardrobe of smart black trouser suits and moderate-height heels. She grew up in a suburb of New York and has lived in the city since she began college. She now lives in an insanely huge loft, for which she pays an insanely low rent—so low that she begged me not to print it, knowing how such a thing would make her the object of pure, embittered resentment. Not that having a great place to live wouldn't stir up envy anywhere in the world; it's just that in New York the span between crummy places and fantastic ones is wide. So is the span between the apartment that is an incredible bargain and the one that is wildly overpriced. Only in New York are you likely to find so many identical apartments with so many unidentical price tags. The fact of Jill's living circumstances came to light when I asked her whether selling real estate was like working in a chocolate factory—that is, whether you were tempted to consume the best merchandise yourself. "Most brokers have some kind of good deal," she said sheepishly. "I mean, we get to see everything and we usually end up with something kind of strange and great." Even so, there have to be times when brokers must feel unrequited. One afternoon, I went with Iva Spitzer, a broker with Douglas Elliman, to see a prewar apartment on West Fifty-seventh Street that she was handling. It was quite nice: about fifty-five hundred square feet; eleven rooms or so; a terrace running around the entire apartment; north, south, east, and west views, including a dead-on view of Carnegie Hall; triple-height ceilings; a majestic living room, with cove lighting and a sky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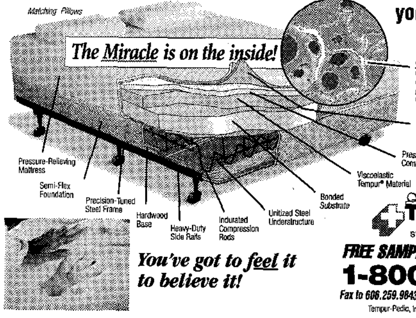
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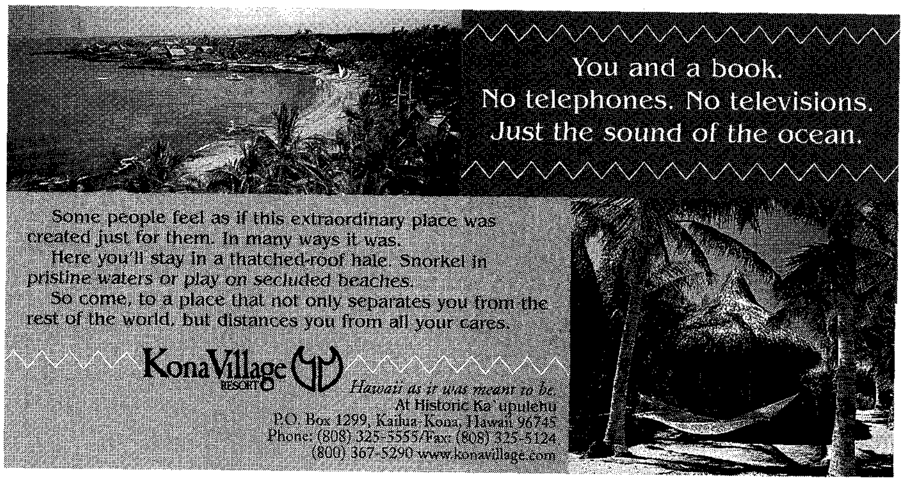

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scene painted on the domed ceiling; a shuttered napping room; black-walnut flooring; a master bathroom bigger than an average bedroom, with the original sunken marble bath and a huge stall shower with sixteen brass shower spigots mounted on the walls and a dinner-plate-size brass showerhead with a few hundred pinpoint spray holes; and a yawningly large professional-quality kitchen with Sub-Zero everything and a stainless-steel fendered range. I could easily imagine living there, until Iva mentioned that it was a rental that happened to be priced at thirty-five thousand dollars a month. I asked if it frustrated her to handle such a place. "No, it's an incredible place, but I don't really see myself here," she said, sounding philosophical. "I see someone like Sean Penn here. Or Puff Daddy."

Real estate can be an aggravating profession. "It's a sort of manic-depressive business," Jill likes to say. "It's always either totally crazy or dead. Things fall through all the time. If you get devastated by stuff like that, you can't go on." Up until twenty years ago, residential real estate in New York City was usually handled by "social brokers"—older women who sold apartments now and then to their friends over afternoon tea or at the hairdresser's. In those years, very little property in Manhattan was actually bought or sold. What few hundred listings existed were handwritten on index cards, collated on knitting needles, and filed in leather binders. The coöperative and condominium conversions that began in the nineteen-seventies turned thousands of rental apartments into real estate that could be bought and sold. Suddenly, there was a lot more money to be made, and real-estate brokerages began attracting actresses and artists and teachers, people who liked the independence and mobility of the job and were used to a certain amount of unpredictability and rejection, and usually came to real estate after another career. Jill was a chef at a couple of popular New York restaurants before she got her broker's license, eleven years ago. She worked from home for a while after she had a baby, and had returned to her office, in the Flatiron district, a year before we met. Iva Spitzer had also been a chef—at a restau-

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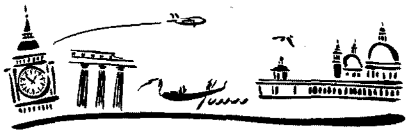

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rant in Boston—before going into real estate. Barbara Corcoran, the owner and founder of the Corcoran Group, had held twenty-six short-term jobs before she started her business; her favorite was waitressing at a diner in New Jersey. She liked it because it was a people job.

EARLY one Tuesday morning last month, I went with Jill to the West Eleventh Street two-bedroom. It was the first day she was showing the apartment. She had advertised it in the *Times* over the weekend and had also posted a description of it on the Corcoran Group Web site, and already she had got a dozen queries. The apartment house was an elegant eight-story brick box built at the turn of the century, with a curlicued bannister running up the stairs and tiny Juliet balconies on each landing, but the interior had been gutted and rebuilt in the early eighties, and the apartments were now stripped-down and undetailed, with chalky-white drywall walls and hollow-core doors. The seven hundred square feet of the apartment were diced up into a galley kitchen, one full bath, a rectangular living room, one average-sized bedroom, and one dwarfish one. Most normal people living in normal cities would probably consider it far too small to live in for the price, but by New York standards it was a sunny, snug, well-located apartment, which would probably sell quickly. In New York, "quickly" means "quickly" and sometimes even "viciously." When the market in New York is heated up, war breaks out. Real estate gets most people agitated, but in New York it seems to provoke a special fervor. Brokers start accepting only sealed bids, and bids offering more than the asking price are taken for granted. So is offering all cash, proposing to forgo the mortgage-contingency clause in the contract, begging to sign a contract on the spot, and tendering press releases and family portraits to plead one's case. One of Jill's colleagues had a customer who bartered for an apartment with rare French movie posters, which he guaranteed would appreciate in value.

The owner of the apartment had already gone to work when we arrived, but she had obviously tidied up before she left. A few fresh magazines were

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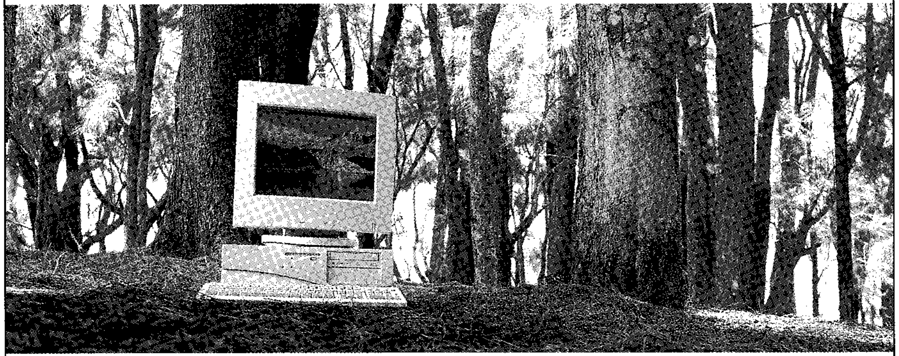

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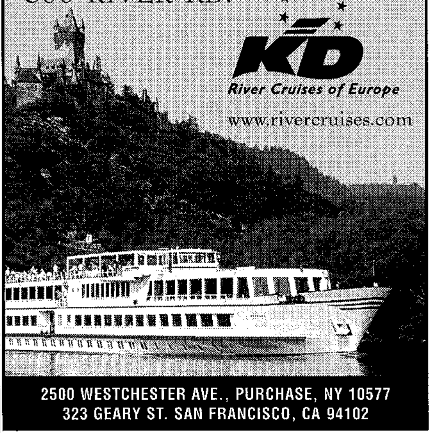

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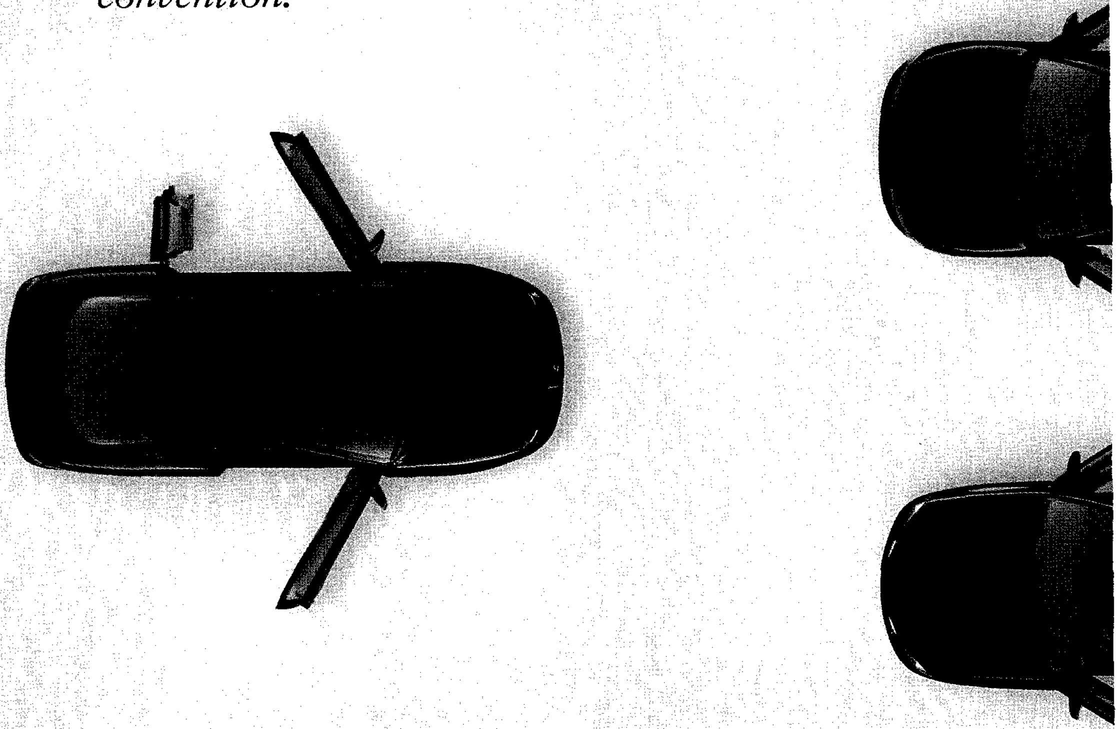

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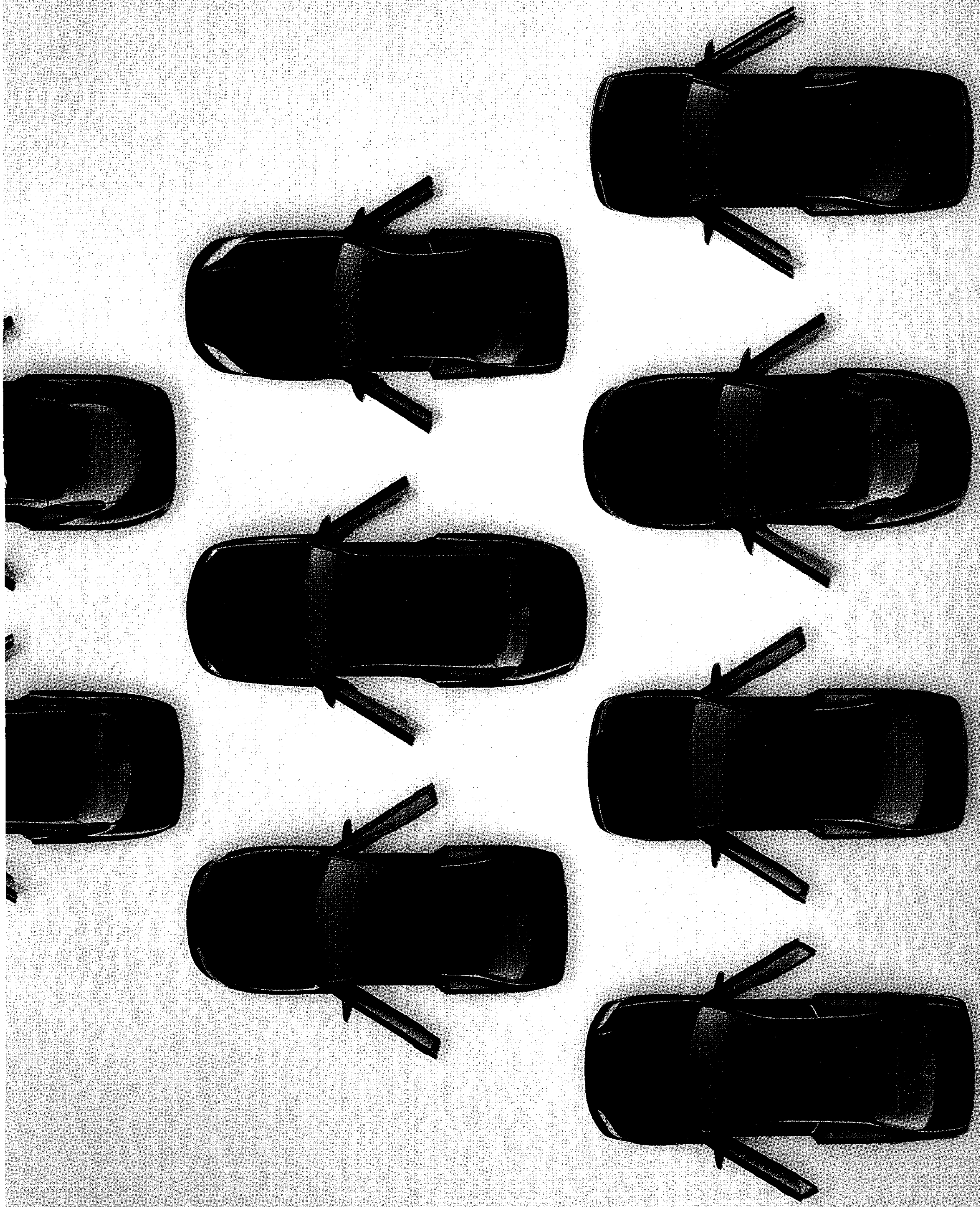

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fanned out on her coffee table like a deck of cards, and all the wastebaskets were empty. Her cat was on the sofa, chewing on a piece of wire and daydreaming. It was a chilly but brilliant day and the apartment was filled with light. Right after we settled in, a broker named Jackie called from the lobby, and a moment later she stepped through the door with her customer, a pale young man with a shaved head. The customer surveyed the little living room and then walked to the window and gazed out onto the street.

"Boy, it's really sunny," Jackie said.

"All day," Jill said.

"Such a pretty block," Jackie added.

"Quintessential Village," Jill said. She turned to the young man and told him, "By the way, none of the walls in here are structural, so you can move them all around if you want to."

The customer wandered out of the living room, into the bigger bedroom, and then into the bathroom. "I'm not in a rush to buy," he called over his shoulder. "I've only been looking for about a year." Jackie shot Jill a look.

After a minute, the customer said, "You know, I just realized that I forgot my glasses, so I'm going to have to come back and look another time." He wandered out the front door. Jackie trailed behind, mouthing "I'll call you" to Jill.

"She'll never call," Jill said, closing the door behind them.

A few minutes later, another broker—Bill from Douglas Elliman—appeared at the door, accompanied by another pale young man. This one was carrying a briefcase, which he dropped in the kitchen doorway. When he was out of earshot, his broker whispered to Jill, "Look! That's good! When people put their bags down, it means they plan to stay for a while."

The young man came back into earshot. "Wow, there's a lot of light in here," he said.

"None of the walls are structural, so you can move anything," Jill said. "I mean, if you want to."

"The light is really beautiful," the customer said.

"It's a historic block," his broker added.

"It's beautiful light," the customer said, "and I like the exposed brick." He took another turn around the living room and said, "I love this building! This feels so good!"

"You could take down the wall between the bedrooms," Jill said. "Or between the kitchen and the little bedroom."

The customer wasn't listening. "That's my deal, see. I need light. And this has light. It's awesome. Beautiful. I really like it."

A broker named Edna arrived, leading her customer, a poker-faced young woman who said she worked as a recipe tester for a gourmet magazine. Edna dawdled by the door while the woman scanned the apartment. Then they huddled in the living room and waited for the young man and the Douglas Elliman broker to leave. Once they had gone, Jill turned to Edna and her customer. "So?" she said.

"I love it," the young woman said. "I want it."

Jill raised her eyebrows.

"I really, really love it," the young woman went on. "By the way, are dogs O.K.?"

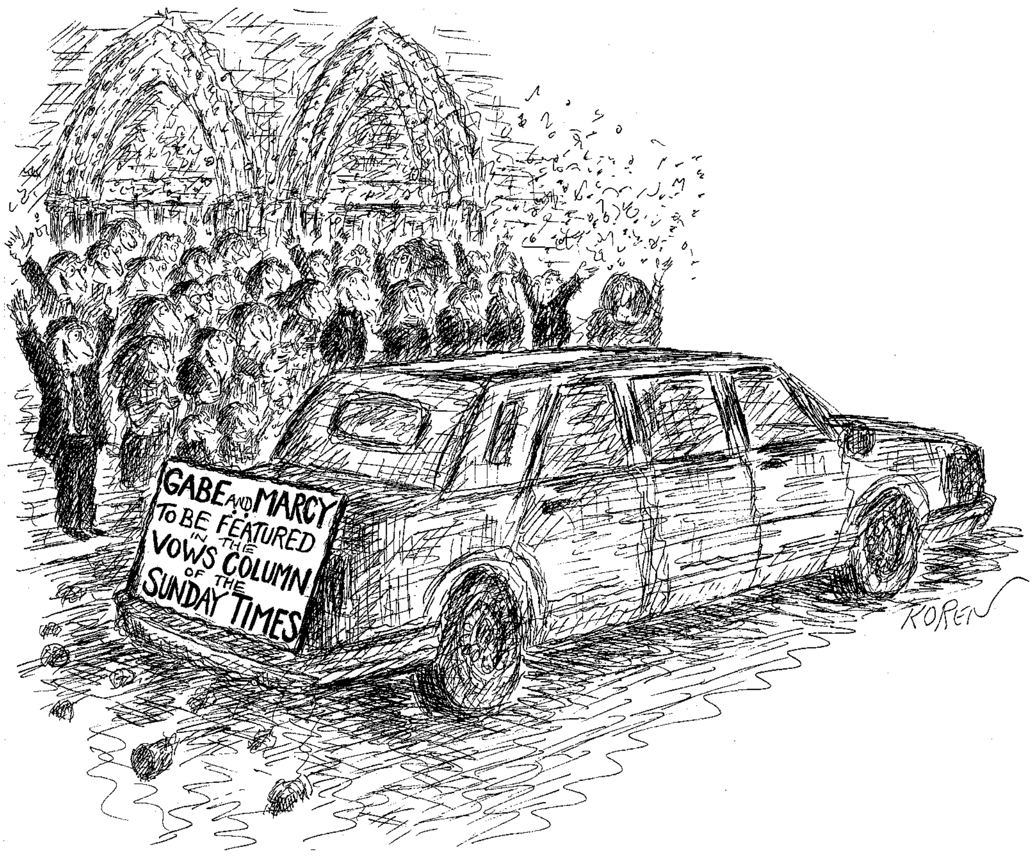
Jill lowered her eyebrows. "No dogs," she said. "Sorry."

Edna clutched at her throat and gasped. "Oh God. No dogs? No dogs? You have *got* to be kidding. Well, there goes my deal. She wants to buy the apartment right now. However, she has a dog."

The young woman started to tremble. "My dog is like . . . *adorable!* She looks like Benji! She's totally quiet! Look, I want this apartment! I really want it!"

Jill asked her if the dog was bigger than a cat. The young woman chewed on her lip for a minute and then said, "Well, I don't know how she would compare to a cat, but if you cut a wheaten terrier in half that's what she looks like. Her name is Hunni, and she licks everybody, and everybody loves her. I can pay all cash for the apartment. I'll pay the asking price. I mean, I really love this place."

"Let me think," Jill said, jiggling her foot. "O.K., maybe I should present it to the co-op board as . . . as a catlike dog named Hunni. Why don't you write a letter to the board and describe her and talk about what she does during the day and what she does during vacations, and then we can present it from there." The young woman looked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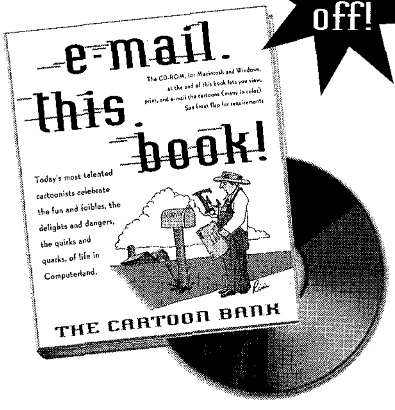
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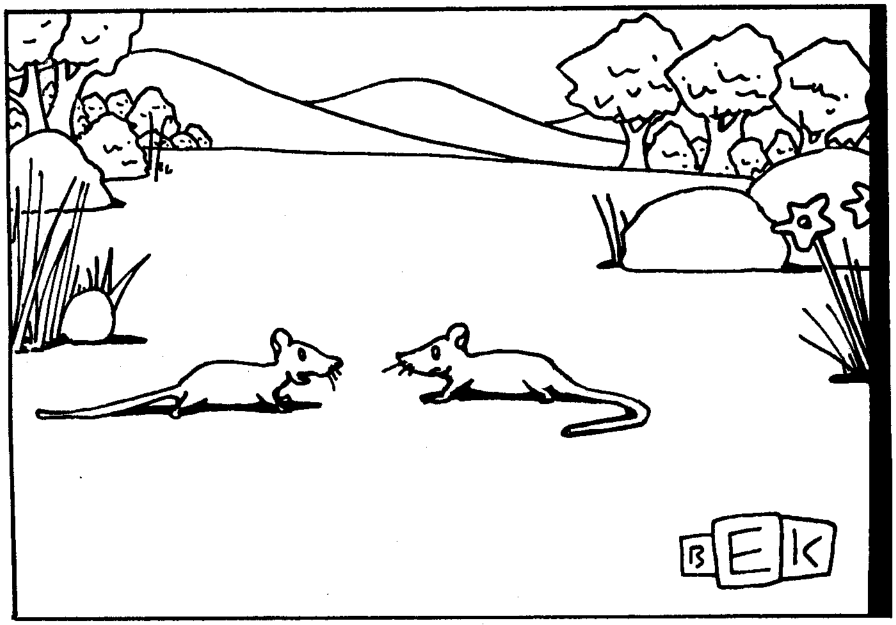
buoyed, said she would write the letter that day, and offered to bring Hunni over to meet people in the building.

"That might be premature," Jill said. "I'd go with the letter."

The next day, a letter supporting Hunni's residency application arrived by fax at the Corcoran Group offices. Jill passed it along to the co-op board president, who said that Hunni sounded very likable but the answer was still no.

BECAUSE of the idiosyncrasies of the market, New York brokers come to know more about their clients than brokers elsewhere ordinarily do. If you are buying a house in the suburbs, your broker might never know the exact details of your economic circumstances. In New York, most privately held apartments are part of either a co-op or a condominium association. Anybody with enough money can purchase a condominium, but a prospective buyer of a co-op must submit supporting material to the building's board of directors, including letters of reference, a complete statement of net worth, and, often, tax returns going back several years, and then must sit for an interview with the board's admissions committee. Even with a mortgage in hand, a buyer isn't guaranteed a deal until he or she gets the committee's approval. A good broker will help a buyer prepare the board package, which means that he or she will see your letters of reference, figures on your net worth, and your tax returns—details many people consider rather personal. Because New Yorkers move so much—more than other Americans do—they often work with a broker repeatedly. Several of Jill's customers were people who had bought or sold through her before. And, whether it's because prices are so high in the city or because New Yorkers are peculiarly indecisive, it seems to take some people a long, long time to buy a place to live, and they therefore spend a long, long time with their brokers. Two of Jill's active customers had been looking for two years, and a few more had been looking almost as long. In the meantime, their lives had changed, their jobs had evolved, they'd got more money, they'd had kids, they'd colored their hair, their marital status had wavered. Some had come to regard Jill as a friend. She worried over them and kept an eye on their psychic real estate as well as on their



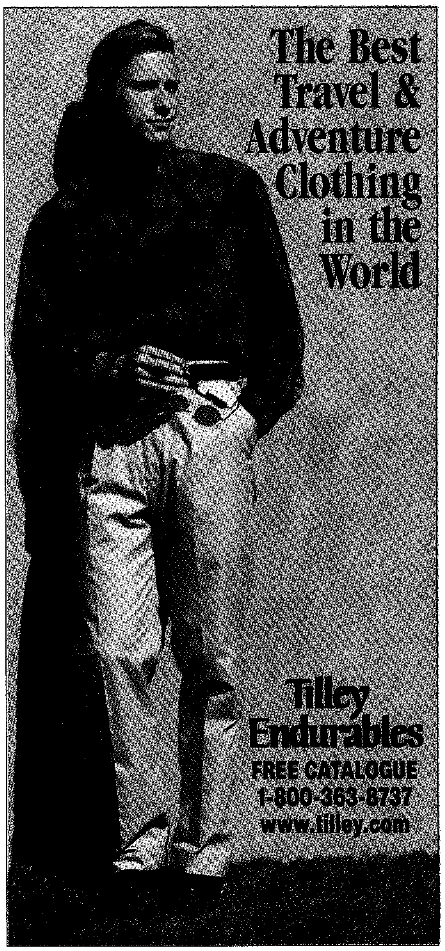
"I hear the streets are paved with garbage."

• •

real real estate. A few of her customers have asked her to play matchmaker if she ever had a customer she thought they'd like.

Jill was fretting that day over Lucy, a customer of hers who worked in film production. Lucy had been looking for an apartment for two years. Jill wanted her to buy the Eleventh Street apartment but despaired that she couldn't commit. "Lucy really needs to get focussed," she said, sighing. "She's backed out of a few deals already and she just puts herself through agony every time. We had a talk one day about whether we should keep working together, and whether our relationship was getting to be too much of a burden, but I think we worked it out." Bertram, an architect who'd been looking with Jill for a year, was "a perfectionist, and very apprehensive," Jill told me. "He thinks he wants to live downtown, but I think he should really be looking in Chelsea, considering what he can pay, so we're working on that." Bertram had an accepted offer on a place in Chelsea, but Jill knew him well enough not to consider it a done deal. While she was waiting for another broker to show up at West Eleventh, she checked her voice mail. There was a message from Bertram saying he'd decided to withdraw his offer on the Chelsea place, because he'd heard from a resident of the building that another apartment there had just sold for less than he was offering. "I knew it. He got stressed out," Jill said. "He was so nervous anyway." She also got a message from a customer telling her he'd decided he could spend more, so she could expand the price range as she searched for him; a message from a customer who was preparing his board package and had forgotten to get letters of reference and was in a panic; and a message from an art dealer who had read about Jill on the Corcoran Web site and was interested in the Eleventh Street place.

The Corcoran Group is now selling an apartment a day through its Web site. Barbara Corcoran believes that the Internet will eventually replace much of the work now being done by brokers. A typical person buying an apartment in New York City calls in response to a newspaper ad and then sees an average of fourteen apartments before buying; someone real-estate shopping on a computer sees floor plans, photographs, long descriptions, and a biography of the broker before making a call, and then seems to need to see only four apartments before buying. Instead of making brokers obsolete, Internet real-estate shopping will make the marketing part of their job more critical, and waste less of their time dragging customers around town. In the meantime, though, being a broker remains a full-



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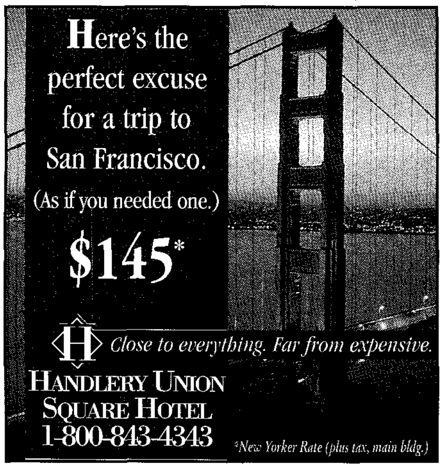
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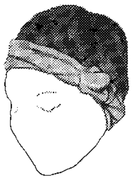

time—even a day-and-nighttime—job. As the next broker was heading up to see West Eleventh Street, Jill mentioned that she'd had a terrible dream the night before. She dreamed that she had run into a friend whom she'd been showing apartments to—a real person, whom she really is showing apartments to—and the friend told her that she'd just bought an apartment from another broker. The apartment was in the West Fifties. "It was just awful!" Jill said. "I've been showing her apartments forever. I said, 'Lil! You told me you would never live in the West Fifties!' I couldn't believe it. I think that when I see her I'm going to feel really upset, even though it was just a dream."

THERE were two big stories in New York real estate that week. One was that a four-bedroom duplex loft that had been on the market for seven years—an unofficial record for longevity—and had been handled at one time or another by every broker in town (including Jill) had finally been sold. The other was that at a recent closing the attorney had threatened to withhold twenty-five thousand dollars of the broker's commission, so the broker grabbed the contract away from the attorney, which compelled the attorney to smash the broker's arm onto the table, bruising it severely and breaking her watch. A few brokers who had heard this tale suggested that in the future all closings be moderated by a therapist. Iva once remarked that she became the center of attention at any gathering as soon as she mentioned she was a broker; everyone had a horror story or a happy story to recount, and wanted to know whether the market was going up or down and whether a person had got a good deal or had been ripped off and whether she knew about Building X or Apartment Y. The experience, she said, was sort of like telling people at a dinner party that you're a doctor, and finding yourself besieged with moles to examine and surgery stories to hear.

"Shopping for apartments, I think, is horrible for most people," Jill said. "They get very emotional." We had taken a break from West Eleventh Street and were walking back to her office. The air was fresh and sweet and cold, and the sky was as blue as a swim-

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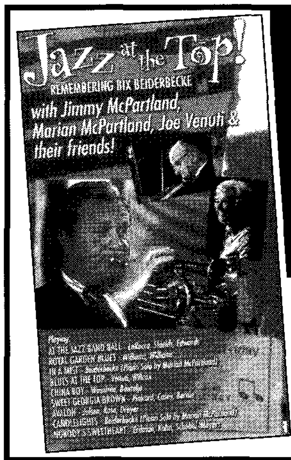
ming pool, and all the buildings on the block glowed a little in the afternoon sun. We passed a brownstone with wide stairs and a handkerchief-size garden. "Really nice inside," Jill said, nodding toward it. "I showed it to some people last year, and they almost bid on it, but they were thinking of starting a family, and it would have been too small." This made her think of Vivian, who is currently single but wants a two-bedroom. "She's so lovely," Jill said. "And I guess she's optimistic, even though she complains to me how impossible it is to meet men." That made her think of Greg, who is also single, and whose loft she had just got as an exclusive, because his next-door neighbor's daughter went to school with Jill's daughter. And that made her think of an apartment for sale on the Upper East Side that Greg might like to buy after she sold his loft. And that made her think of Lucy, for no particular reason except that she thought about her often, and decided she would take her back to see something at London Terrace, a large prewar complex in Chelsea, because, even though Lucy had bid and backed out on something there before, Jill thought she might have finally reached the point where she would just buy something halfway decent, so she could stop looking. Around every corner we turned was another building that Jill knew or had sold something in or had handled in some way. It was as if to her the city's buildings all quivered with change and movement: her view was like time-lapse photography that reveals commotion in something that otherwise, in quick glances, appears to be entirely still.

A few days later, Jill sent me a message saying that she'd sold the West Eleventh Street apartment to a couple—a film editor and a network-news employee—for two hundred and seventy thousand dollars; that Vivian had decided not to bid on the loft with the dungeon; that Lucy had agreed to look at London Terrace again; that the art dealer who came to her through the Web site hadn't bid on West Eleventh but wanted Jill to take her around. She had got a number of new customers who had answered the ad for West Eleventh, and would lose a few old ones, at least temporarily, once they'd found a place, bought it, and moved. It was business as usual. ♦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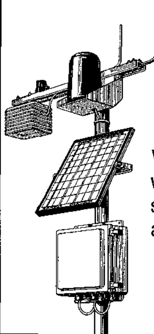

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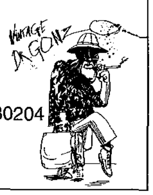

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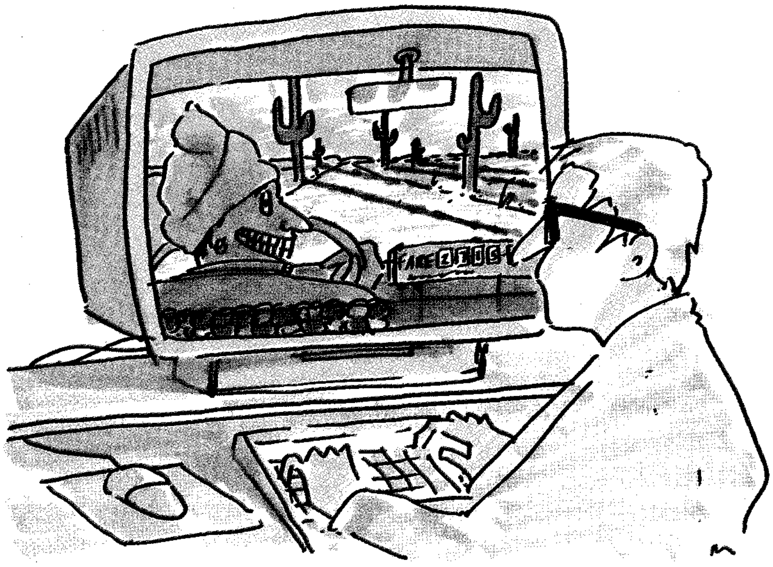
SHOUTS & MURMURS

RIPOFF!

BY DAVID OWEN

THE rapid growth of the Internet raises many vexing copyright issues. I have no doubt of the truth of that sentence, because I lifted it straight from someone's Web site. I didn't even retype it!

The biggest Internet-related copyright issue, though, goes far beyond idle plagiarism—long the foundation of the reporter's humble craft. Indeed, I have come to suspect that the Internet itself is a ripoff, and an astonishingly brazen one: the entire sprawling on-line world, I now believe, is nothing but a crudely patched-together digital misappropriation of long-established intellectual property of the city of New York.



The evidence is overwhelming. Like New York, the Internet features inexplicable traffic delays, random confrontations with lunatics, and easy, private, around-the-clock access to pornography. The Internet chat room, in which faceless male lowlifes conduct innuendo-filled exchanges while pretending to be women, is a pale electronic simulacrum of its obvious real-life analogue, the Manhattan hotel bar. And "flaming"—the near-psychotic reaming out of innocent strangers on Internet message boards—is merely a keyboard-based version of the method by which New Yorkers have always conversed. (In Gristede's fifteen years ago, I got into a screaming fight with a woman over her contention that a shopper who was buying just three items—me—had a moral if not a legal obligation to use the express checkout line even though the express checkout line was longer and moving more slowly than the regular checkout line, the rear of which was being brought up by a loudmouthed, face-lifted, cubic-zirconia-encrusted battle-axe with an overflowing cart: her.)

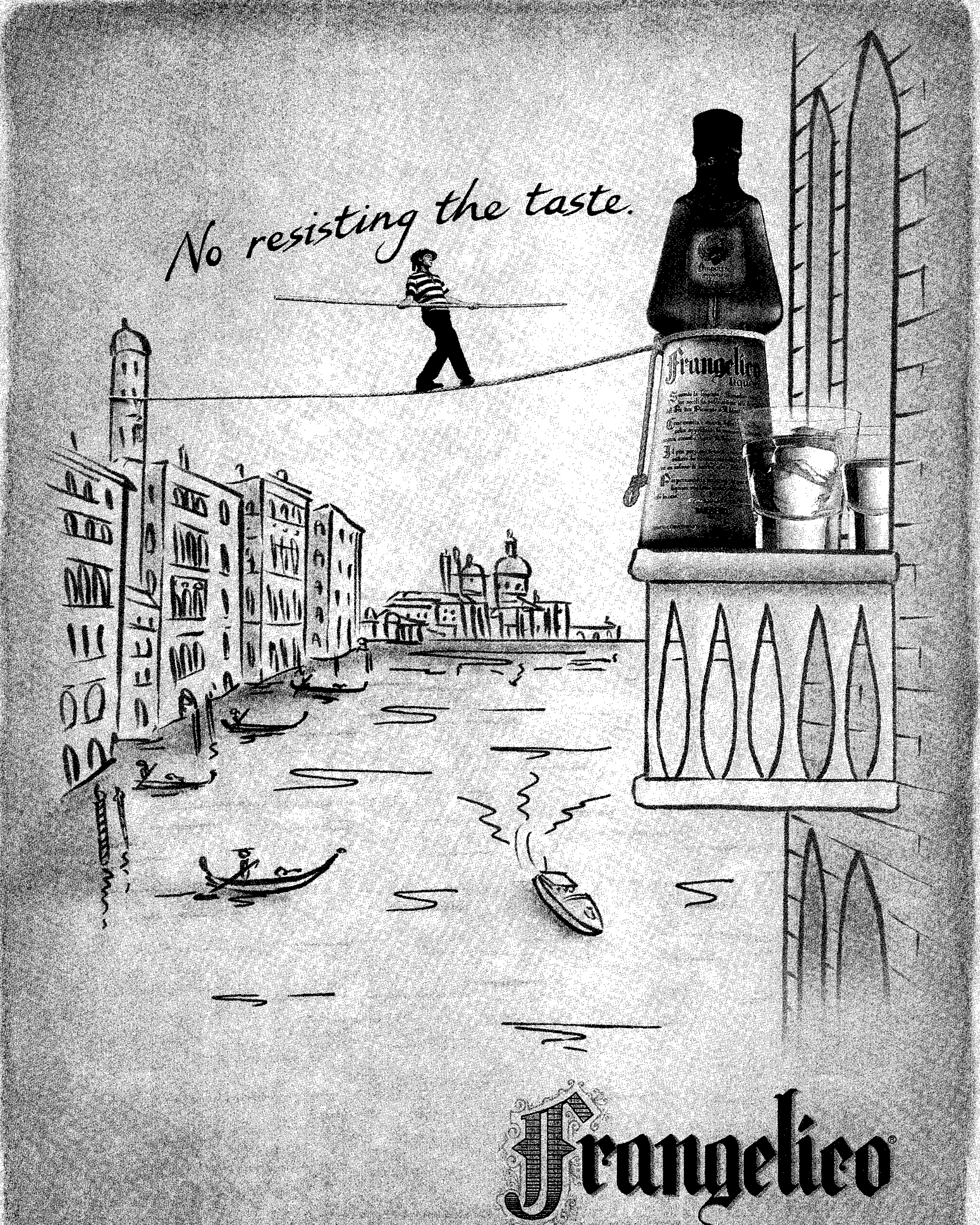
But the theft goes far deeper. The pervasive tone of virtually all on-line communication—a tone that might best be characterized as intimate anonymity—was first developed in Manhattan, by adjacent renters in apartment buildings on the Upper East Side. The Internet's core method of routing information (whereby data don't travel directly from Point A to Point B but are broken apart, dispersed over a far-flung network, and reassembled at their destination) is cribbed from the method by which New York City taxi-drivers have long conveyed arriving internationals from Kennedy Airport to midtown Manhattan. And what is the hyperlink but a wan imitation of one of New York's best-known and most representative amenities, that every block in the city contains a door through which one can enter the same Chinese restaurant?

As a matter of fact, the very notion of meaningful linkage, which forms the conceptual heart of the World Wide Web, was perfected in New York decades ago. I can offer an example from my own experience. One afternoon in 1979, my wife and I went to see Woody Allen's movie "Manhattan," which had just opened. While we were walking home afterward—through Manhattan—we passed Woody Allen himself, who was walking in the opposite direction. My wife and I at that moment were discussing Allen's portrayal of women in the movie, and Allen was walking next to, and talking with, a woman. Had my wife and I so desired, we could have turned around, proceeded a dozen or so blocks back down Fifth Avenue, entered any of several bookstores, and purchased any of several books or magazines containing references to Allen's portrayal of women in one or another of his films. Or we could have stopped at a newsstand and obtained a newspaper that listed those New York City theatres in which revivals of Allen's earlier women-portraying movies were then playing. Or we could have continued north on Fifth Avenue to the apartment of a woman we knew—a woman who was a friend of a writer who would one day become a friend and occasional collaborator of Woody Allen's.

So, whom do we sue? (The casually threatened, utterly groundless class-action lawsuit—a recurring theme of nearly all Internet newsgroup discussions—was, of course, first developed by New Yorkers.) This case could be worth billions to the aggrieved parties (us), assuming we can figure out who's got the deep pockets. All we need is a shameless, blustering, egomaniacal attorney who is willing, in exchange for a cut of the profits, to spend ten or twenty years doggedly dragging this thing through the courts.

Luckily, I've got just the guy. I found his name in a banner advertisement under the heading "Lawyers" in the greatest search engine the world has ever known: the Manhattan Yellow Pages. ◆

MICHAEL CRAWFORD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LETTER FROM QUEENS

A HUSBAND FOR DIL

Can tradition make a young woman happy?

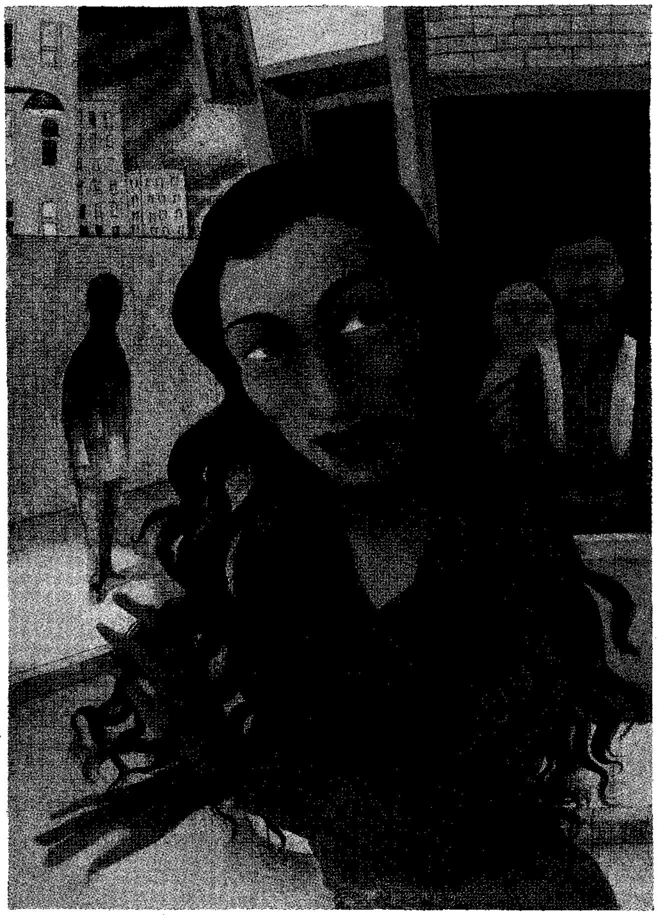
BY PHILIP GOUREVITCH

A FEW months ago, in the Lefrak City apartment complex, in Queens, I met a young woman named Dilshad Ahamed, who said, "My typical husband would be someone I could come home, relax, sit, and watch 'Mad About You' with, and be totally fine." Her father had recently announced that it was time for her to be married, but Dil, as she calls herself, did not want to be rushed. "I want my husband to like things that I like. I want him to enjoy sharing things that I do," she said. "I'm going to spend my whole life with this person. I don't want to have him always just having his way. Why should I? Have I no rights? I mean, come on, that's ridiculous."

Dil is nineteen, a sophomore at Queens College; she is tall and dark-eyed, with long black henna-shined hair and a theatrically sculpted face. "Truthfully," she said, "I have really never had a boyfriend-boyfriend." But, she told me, "one guy I did fall in love with." She considered this guy "perfect to marry," and by perfect she meant that he met the essential criteria for her parents' approval: same cultural background (Indian), religion (Muslim), and language (Urdu). "When I get into a relationship," she said, "that's the first thing in my mind—marriage—because I know it's coming, sooner or later." So Dil's first love was a disappointment. "I was definitely very infatuated with the person, but the person was after one thing, and that's all he wanted," she said. "He just wanted the intimacy part, and that's not something I could live by, because I know if that's all you want, then there's no future."

Sometimes Dil watched Indian movies on video. The story was almost always the same—"the guy falls in love with the girl" and "the girl's in love with the guy" and "the parents are totally against it" and there's "a whole bunch of fighting," and "at the end, eventually, the couple gets together"—a bit like "Mad About You" meets the Ramayana. Dil didn't take encouragement from the formula. "It's all about love," she said. "Movies don't really show what real life has to offer. That's the sad part." After all, she told me, "As far as boyfriends go, even if I did have one there's no way that I could bring him home and say, 'Oh, Mom, you know, this is just a guy that I like and we're going out.' It would be 'Going out for what?'"

Dil's parents immigrated to New York from India in 1976, three years before she was born, and her father now runs a beer-and-beverage store in rural Westchester County. They had come seeking opportunity, and they found a modest slice of it, but that didn't mean they wanted to go native. Dil considers them "strict" and "old-fashioned." She said, "It's always you're born, you stay single, and you're a little Virgin Mary, and then—when it's time that *they* find you a guy—yeah, you're married." That was the way in her family: marriage meant arranged marriage, and "the only guy that's supposed to be in your life until then is your father." For those who accepted this system, "it makes it all kind of easier," Dil told me, but when her father invoked the customs of their country and said, "What we want should make you happy," she wondered, "By fulfilling their happiness, would I really be happy?"



"You're coming of age," Dil's father said to her. "We've got to get you married off."

ANA JUAN

ROUGHLY one out of every six people on earth is Indian, so it goes without saying that Indians find their mates in every conceivable fashion. Nobody keeps track of how they all do it, but it is widely believed that most still allow their matches to be made for them according to family-brokered arrangements. For those who are scattered about in the vast post-colonial Indian diaspora, arranged marriage, perhaps with a spouse imported from back home, is one of the chief means of maintaining community and revitalizing identity. The process often begins among tens of thousands of matrimonial notices that crowd the classified-ad pages of international Indian newspapers and Web sites, where prospects list their "bio-data" in pay-per-word syntax:

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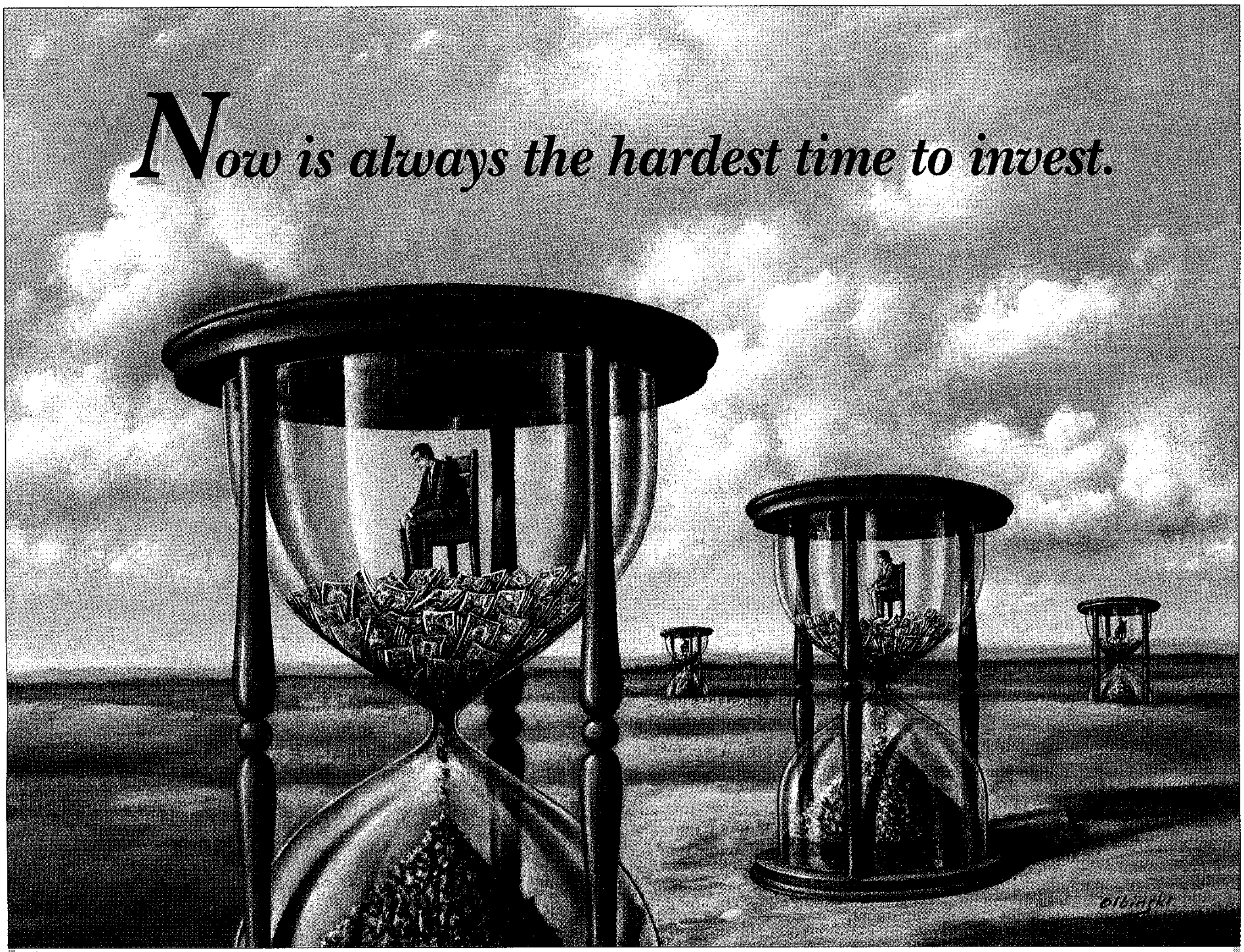
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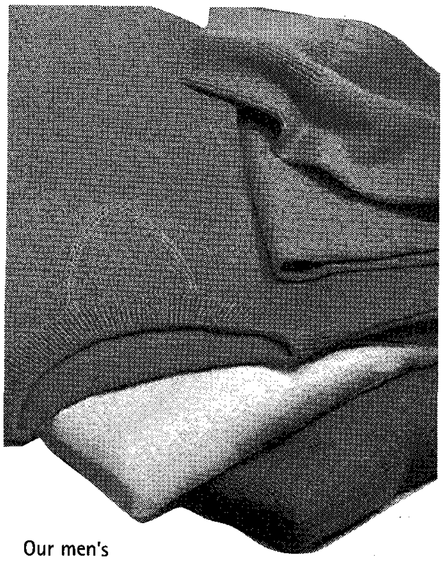
Word is also spread through family and social channels. As the field of candidates is narrowed, the families investigate one another, not infrequently employing private detectives. In the past, once the parents agreed, the bride and groom would be provided with each other's pictures but would not meet until their engagement ceremony. These days, a date or two may be permitted, with or without a chaperone, and in most circles a period of at least twenty-four hours is granted for everyone to consider the union before saying yes.

The variations are nearly infinite: children can be betrothed by their parents; love matches can be formalized by the families, or broken up by the families; a dowry settlement may be negotiated; and the marriage can be as delightful—or as ghastly—as any other kind of marriage. But, as Shamita Das Dasgupta, an Indian-born professor of psychology at Rutgers, told me, "The parental-arranged marriage, although it may be very successful, takes away one thing for sure. That is the autonomy of the people who are marrying, and that is the crucial element." And while Dil said, "Statistics say that arranged marriages work out better than love marriages—fewer divorces," she also reminded me that bride-burning is sometimes an alternative to divorce in India. "Maybe it's fewer divorces because these arranged marriages are happening through culture, and divorces are considered unheard of—taboo."

When I met Dil, she was wearing bluejeans and a red V-neck sweater that bore an image of Mickey Mouse saluting. "My father wants me to live in Indian culture," she told me. "But—hello!—look where we are." Until recently, the Indian community in the United States was very small; in 1965, it numbered fewer than ten thousand people. Then the laws that limited immigration from non-European countries were relaxed, and today the country is home to at least eight hundred thousand people of recent Indian origin. In New York, the center of Indian life is the Jackson Heights section of Queens. There, after a twenty-minute ride from midtown Manhattan, one descends from the elevated tracks of the No. 7 train into a city within the city: Indian bookshops, Indian jewelry shops, Indian music shops, Indian astrologers, Indian spice shops, Indian travel agencies, and Indian sari emporiums, whose display-window mannequins—draped in resplendent silks—are blond.

Dil was born in Queens, but she has always lived several miles, or half a dozen subway stops, from Jackson Heights. She has known no home other than her family's three-bedroom apartment in Lefrak City (named for Samuel Lefrak, a developer who built the complex of four thousand six hundred and fifty middle-income rental units in the early sixties). The surrounding area of Elmhurst-Corona, which is home to scores of distinct immigrant communities from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, has been described by city planners as "perhaps the most ethnically mixed community in the world," but Lefrak City is occupied almost entirely by African-Americans and Hispanics. On one side, the concrete-and-brick stacks of the complex front the Long Island Expressway; on the other side runs a stretch of Fifty-seventh Avenue that has long been one of the city's busiest narcotics bazaars. "It's practically the ghetto here," Dil said. "The only white people are a few Russians, and there are just a few other Indian families that I know of. I didn't have any Indian friends, growing up."

By the time she was in high school, Dil spoke Urdu at home, Spanish on the streets, and "a lingo like Ebonics" with her friends. She wasn't complaining. When she told her friends about arranged marriages, they said things like "I could never," and she found their perspective liberating. "That's where the tug-of-war starts," she told me. "You have culture in the home, but when you walk out of the house it's



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special advertising section

NEW YORK STATE OF MIND

An Insider's View of Gotham

from **Fodor's**

From Michael Adams' introduction to "Fodor's New York City '99"

New York has long been a mosaic of grand contradictions, a city for which there has never been—nor ever will be—a clear consensus. Yet, millions live here, grumbling but happy, and millions more visit, curious as cats to find out what the magnificent fuss is all about.

Falling in love with New York can happen in a single moment, to a visitor or to a longtime resident. Perhaps it hits during a stroll through Riverside Park after a blanketing snowfall, when the trees have turned to crystal and the city feels a hush it knows at no other time. Or maybe it occurs when you turn a corner and suddenly spy—beyond a morass of tangled cables and high-beam lights—the filming of a new movie. Or, when you first glimpse the Prometheus statue in Rockefeller Center, gleaming under the annual Christmas tree as skaters cut swirls of seasonal colors on the ice below. Other landmarks can excite a visitor's infatuation too: frenetic Grand Central Station abustle with suburban commuters, the concrete caverns of Wall Street throbbing with ambition; or the Statue of Liberty, which neither cliché nor cheap souvenir can render common.

At times like these it is perfectly permissible to stop for a moment, take a breath, and think, "Wow! This is New York!" We who live here do it every so often ourselves.

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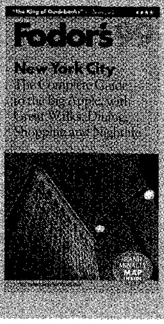

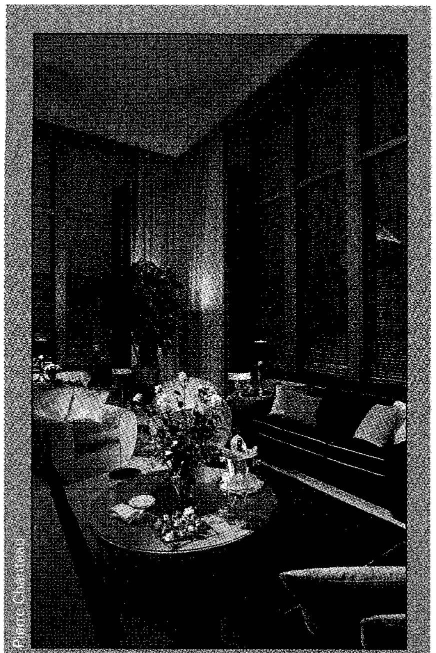

Pierre Chateau

One of The Towers' four triplex suites at dusk.

In a city of noteworthy hotels, a longtime favorite has set a new standard. Every inch of **The New York Palace**, on Madison Avenue at 50th Street, has been refurbished or renovated. Only its perfect midtown location and unsurpassed views of the city skyline remain untouched. No sooner did The New York Palace emerge from this transformation than it earned the coveted Five Diamond Award, the American Automobile Association's top honor, reserved only for hotels with the highest level of service. A stroll through the gates of the stately Courtyard takes guests into the lobby where a grand staircase is a photogenic focal point. Le Cirque 2000 has relocated to the landmark Villard Houses that are incorporated into the hotel. The hotel's guest rooms are spacious and meticulously appointed. New additions to the hotel include a 7,000-square-foot Fitness Center and the restaurant Istana featuring Mediterranean and American specialties. The Towers, a "hotel within a hotel" on the upper floors, has its own reception area and concierge, private elevators, *maître d'etage* (butler service) and offers room service through Le Cirque 2000 and Sushisay, one of the city's finest Japanese restaurants. Visit The New York Palace to experience New York at its luxurious best.

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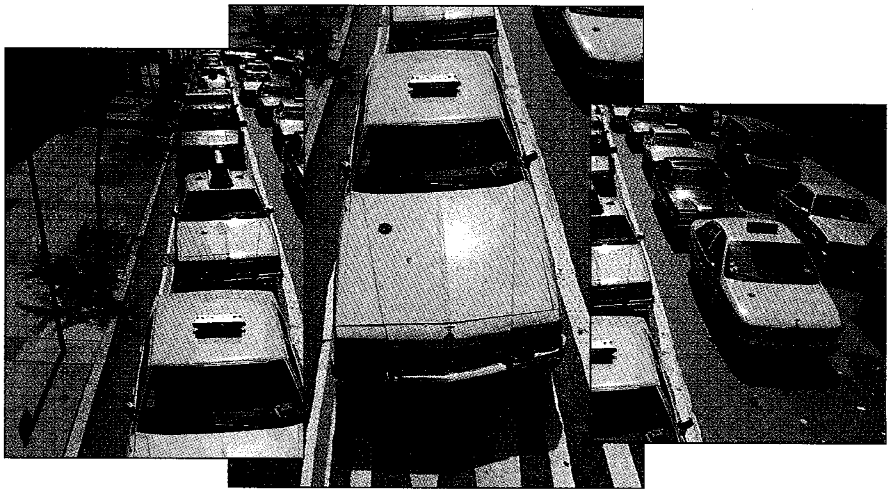


All photos in section by Michael Yamashita

IF IT'S NOT IN THE APPLE, IT DOESN'T EXIST: A FODOR'S SAMPLING

By the editors of "Fodor's CITYGUIDE New York"

New Yorkers are demanding by nature. We won't settle for just any old tie, light bulb, or throw pillow. We want choices, and Manhattan's retailers supply them for us in dizzying array. Here are a few of the city's (and sometimes the world's) largest collections. So don't despair if you can't find the perfect music box for Aunt Bette's birthday, or ballerina flats in just the right shade, or sheet music for Romanian folk songs. In a city that can produce anything under the sun, all you have to do is look.

Just Bulbs Nearly five thousand light bulbs of every description, for every need. This Flatiron shop is great for the hard-to-find. *936 Broadway (between 21st and 22nd streets), 212-228-7820. Subway: N or R to 23rd Street.*

Alice Kwartler Antiques Kwartler has amassed one of the country's largest collections of antique cuff links, supplemented by Art Nouveau and Art Deco lockets and rings. *123 East 57th Street, 212-752-3590. Subway: 4, 5, 6, N, or R to 59th Street.*

New York Central Art Supply Serving New York's artists for more than ninety-five years, New York Central has the finest of everything—handmade papers and parchment, over three thousand pastels, two hundred different canvases, and much more—all for twenty to forty per cent less than elsewhere. *62 Third Avenue (between 10th and 11th streets), 212-473-7705. Subway: 4, 5, 6, N, or R to 14th Street (Union Square) and L to Third Avenue.*

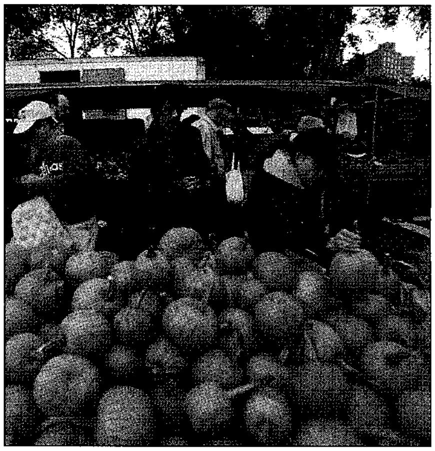
Andrea Carrano This store has a laser-specific, perfectly fulfilled purpose: ballerina flats in every color imaginable, from simple black suede to half a dozen blues to metallic bronze. *955 Madison Avenue (at 75th Street), 212-772-3144. Subway: 6 to 77th Street.*

Paul Stuart The mood here is natty, dashing, conservative but unstuffy, with an emphasis on variety where it counts, hence the tiny shoe section adjacent to the largest selection of good ties in the city (including more bows and knitteds than you've ever seen under a single glass display). Men who buy here know that this is the place to come, bar none, for the best fedora in the Big Apple. *Madison Avenue at 45th Street, 212-682-0320. Subway: 4, 5, 6, or 7 to 42nd Street (Grand Central).*

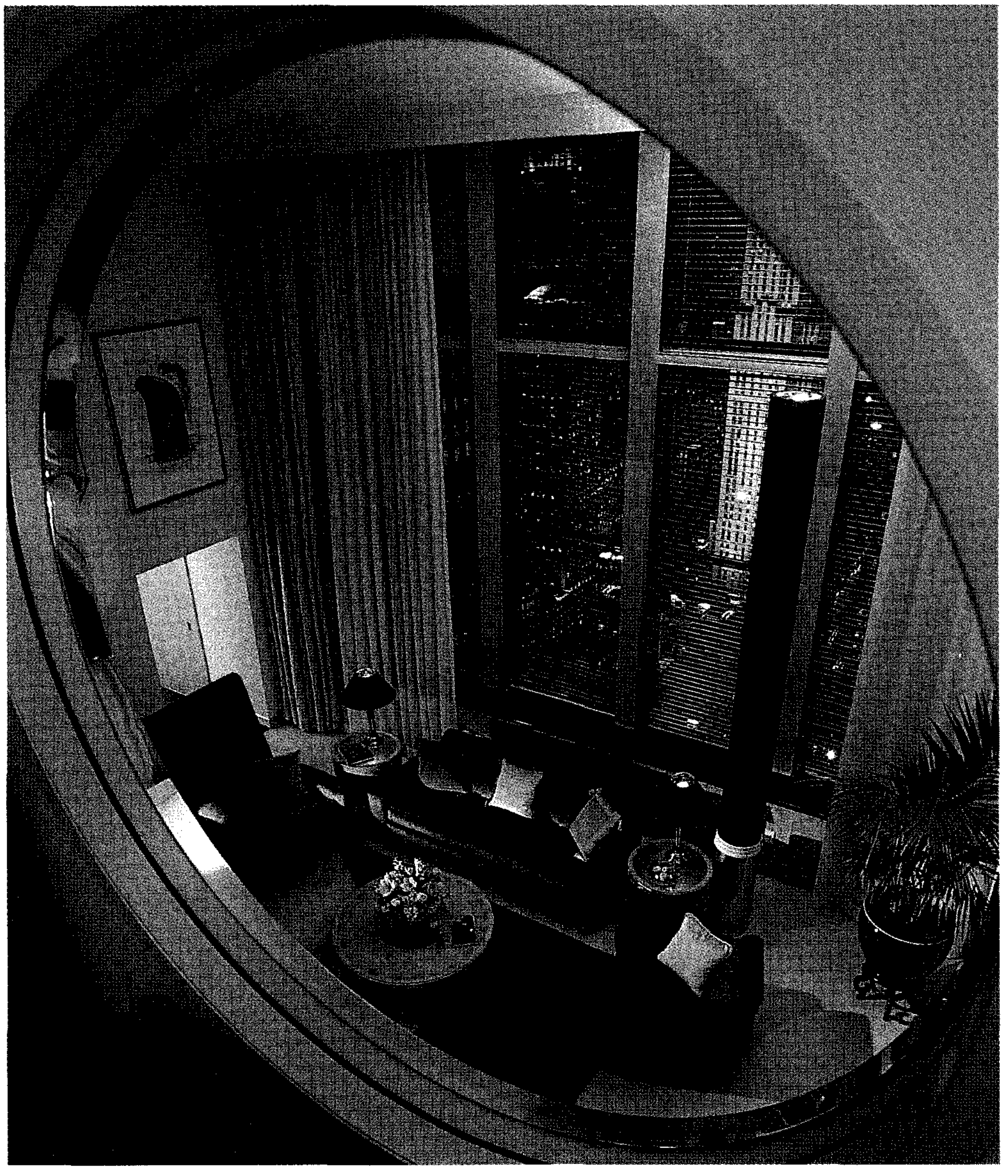
Fairway Famous for good produce at low prices, Fairway goes further by stocking an unbelievable selection—every conceivable fruit and vegetable, from A to Z, include seasonal specialties and baby vegetables. Deliveries arrive daily, so there's never an "off" day, though weekends can be unpleasantly hectic. *2127 Broadway (at 74th Street), 212-595-1888. Subway: 1, 2, 3, or 9 to 72nd Street.*

Quarry Tile, Marble & Granite New York's largest stock of reasonably priced Spanish, English, French, Portuguese, and Mexican tiles comes in bright colors and patterns. The Quarry will provide names of contractors or do-it-yourself guidance and glue. *128 East 32nd Street, 212-679-8889. Closed Sunday. Subway: 6 to 33rd Street (Park Avenue).*

Astor Wines & Spirits The largest liquor store in New York City is a must for bargain-hunting oenophiles. Selections are well-chosen, and the store's own label for spirits is well-priced and of competitive quality. Join the Astor Explorers Club for special wine tastings. *12 Astor Place (at Lafayette Street), 212-674-7500. Closed Sunday. Subway: 6 to Astor Place.*



Union Square Greenmarket



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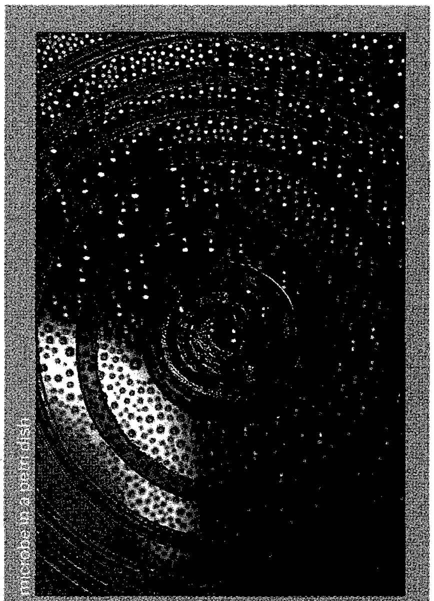


See the fascinating new exhibit "Epidemic! the World of Infectious Disease" at the American Museum of Natural History, February 27th through September 6th.

Today's globetrotters include viruses and bacteria that know no borders—and sometimes have no known treatments. Recognizing microbes and then stopping them once they have entered our bodies takes creativity, ingenuity, and a lot of hard work. In short, it takes intensive scientific research—like the kind undertaken by **Bristol-Myers Squibb**, a world leader in health and personal care products.

Bristol-Myers Squibb is proud to be the lead sponsor of "Epidemic!" We want people to know more about serious infectious diseases like AIDS and hepatitis, since education is key to prevention and control. But good medicines are important, too. A pioneer in antibiotic discovery and production for more than half a century, Bristol-Myers Squibb manufactures a broad array of infectious disease treatments for HIV and serious bacterial infections. And our research is leading the way to breakthroughs in the fight against AIDS, hepatitis, herpes, and antibiotic-resistant infections.

Through greater public education, innovative research, and the best possible treatments, Bristol-Myers Squibb aims to win the war against infectious disease. We're working to extend and enhance human life across borders—for those who travel around town or around the world.

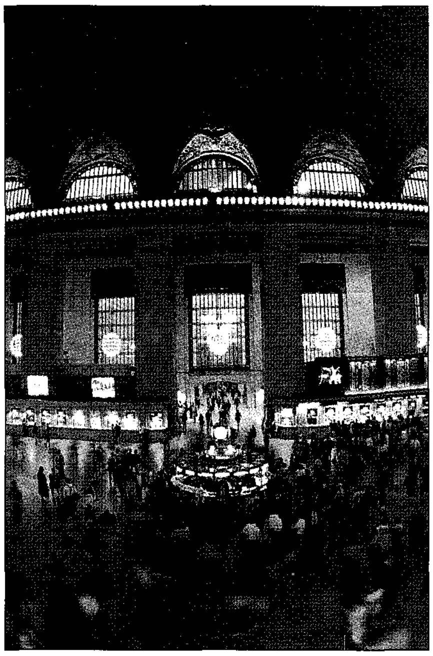
Learn more about infectious disease at www.bms.com.

("A Fodor's Sampling" continued)

J. R. Cigars The world's largest cigar company stocks more than 2,800 different sizes, shapes, and colors—from nickel cigars to the rare and expensive. *One Wall Street Court (Pearl and Wall streets), 212-269-2000; or 11 East 45th Street, 212-983-4160. Closed Sunday. Subway: 2 or 3 to Wall Street; 4, 5, 6, or 7 to 42nd Street (Grand Central).*

The Strand Book Store America's largest secondhand bookstore has twelve miles of books (that's two-and-a-half million volumes) in appropriately dusty quarters at its Broadway store. Head downstairs for review copies of new books at fifty per cent off. Art, history, and Americana are particular strengths, both new and used. Warning: You'll spend more time and money than you intended. *828 Broadway (at 12th Street), 212-473-1452. Subway: 4, 5, 6, N, R, or L to 14th Street (Union Square).*

The Joseph Patelson Music House This quiet, wood-floored shop near Carnegie Hall is the classical musician's haven for sheet music and scores, with an exhaustive, meticulously organized stock (both new and used), knowledgeable staff, and serious atmosphere. Before being bagged, your purchase is slipped into a delightfully unnecessary gray envelope adorned with Patelson's name dancing across a lute, and off you go to finger your cargo fondly before attempting to use it. *160 West 56th Street, 212-582-5840. Subway: N or R to 57th Street (Carnegie Hall).*



Grand Central Station

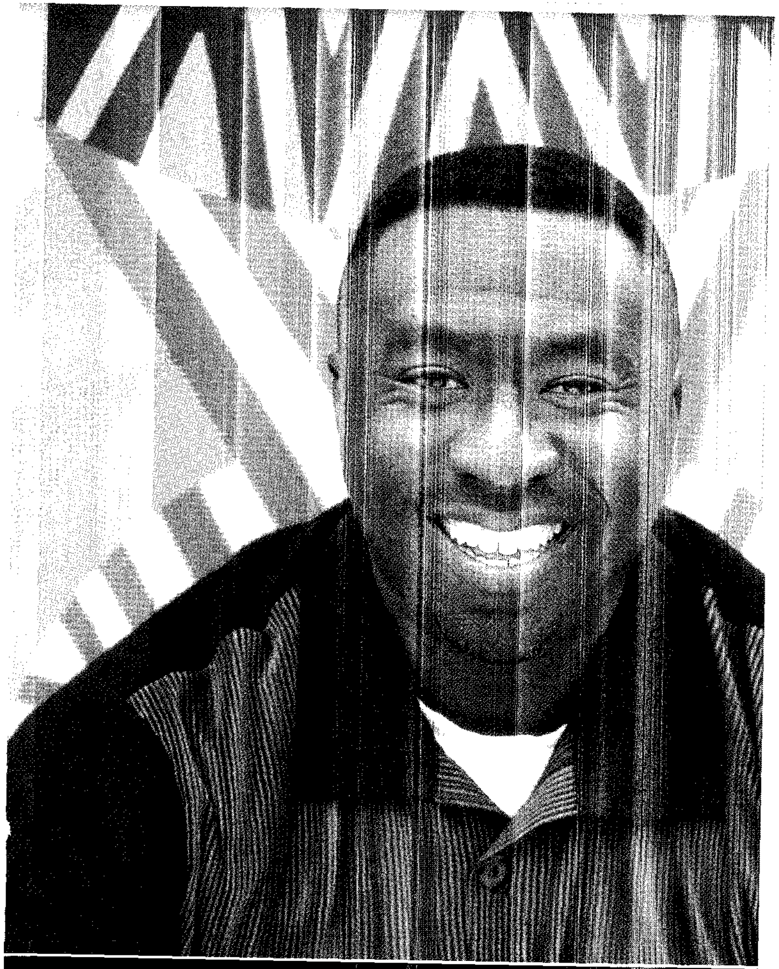
Porthault The Rolls-Royce of sheets are made by Porthault. The store's exclusive and extravagantly expensive line of one hundred per cent cotton bed linens comes in eight hundred prints in a variety of colors. You can also shop for table and bath linens, exquisite children's clothes, and gift items. *18 East 69th Street, 212-688-1660. Subway: 6 to 68th Street (Hunter College).*

Big City Kites Your spirits will soar in this joyful venue, with two hundred varieties of colorful kites for every level of expertise and aspiration. Kite-making supplies and other air toys are also available. Prices range from four to four hundred dollars. *1210 Lexington Avenue (at 82nd Street), 212-472-2623. Subway: 4, 5, or 6 to 86th Street.*

The Pillowry Many of the Pillowry's unusual pillows come from antique textiles and rugs, including kilims from Persia, Afghanistan, Turkey, Russia, and Romania. Other decorative options are old silk, needlepoint, damask, ikat, homespun, Aubusson, and lace. Tapestries and rugs frame your pillows in style, and expert restoration ensures that they'll outlive you. *132 East 61st Street, 212-308-1630. Closed Saturday except by appointment. Subway: 4, 5, 6, N, or R to 59th Street.*

Rita Ford Music Boxes Rita Ford has the best collection of working antique music boxes (circa 1820–1910) in the world, and there are contemporary specimens too. Some of the handcrafted carousels and other unique items are made expressly for this shop. The price range is wide, and the store restores and repairs as well. *19 East 65th Street, 212-535-6717. Subway: 6 to 68th Street (Hunter College).*

Universal News & Magazine If they don't have it, it may not exist. Universal stocks more than seven thousand titles, including foreign newspapers and magazines. *977 Eighth Avenue (between 57th and 58th streets), 212-459-0932. Subway: A, B, C, D, 1, or 9 to 59th Street (Columbus Circle).*



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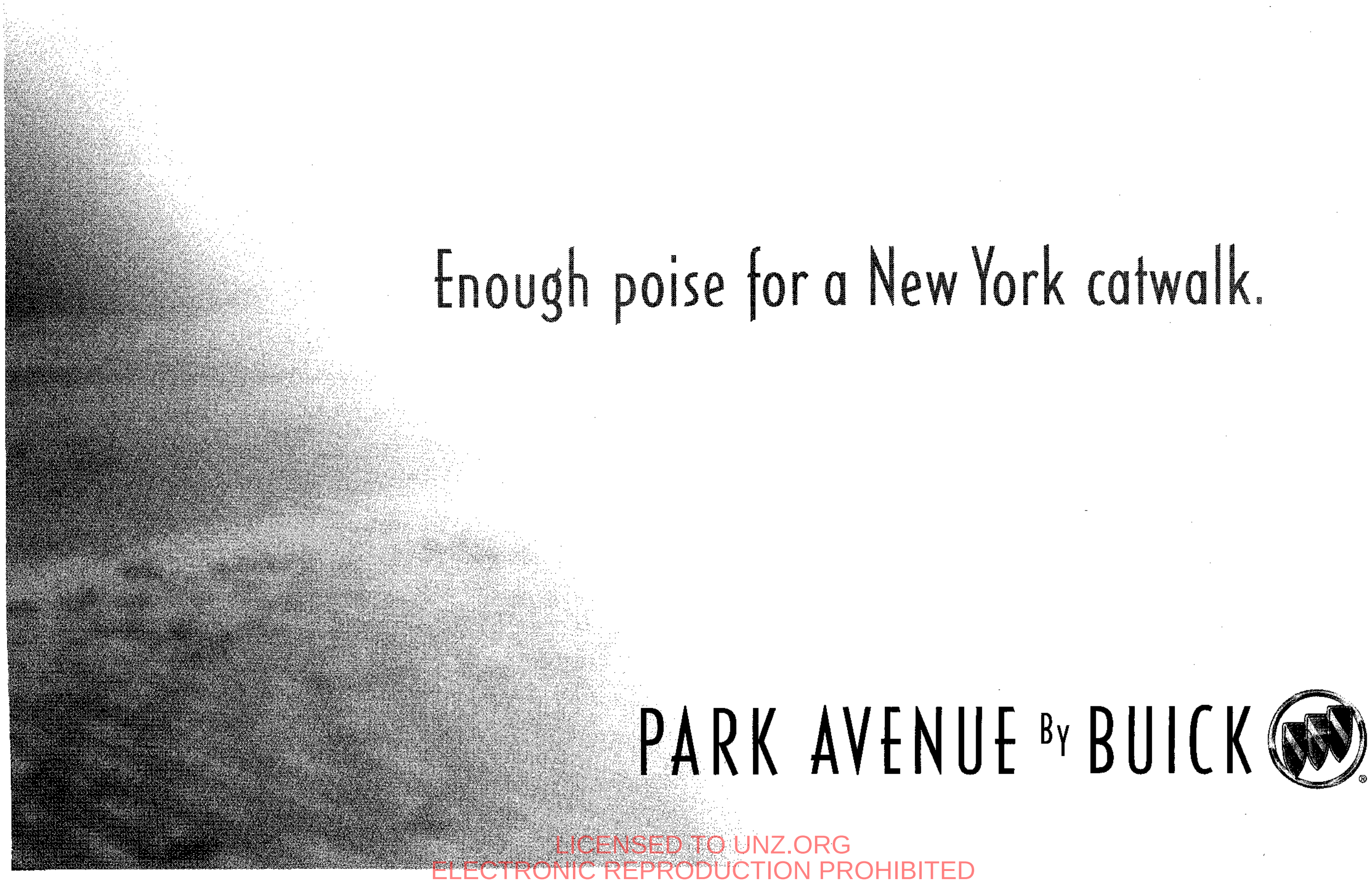
Enough poise for a New York catwalk.
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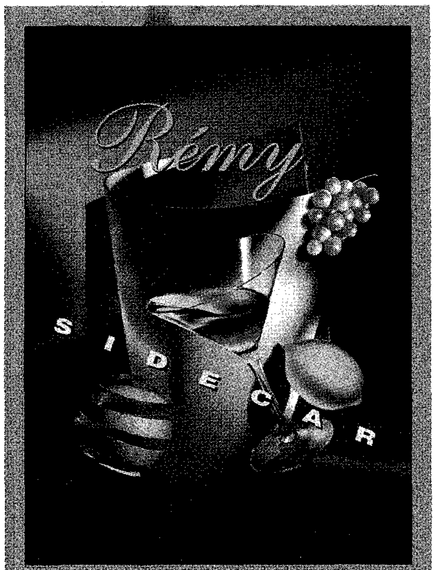

Recipes for Rémy Martin cocktails are available by calling 212-971-1167.

Somehow the icy winter chill and whistling winds that blow through the skyscraper canyons of Manhattan seem a little less daunting with **Rémy Martin Cognac** nearby. For touring Central Park, a flask of soul-warming Rémy Martin XO Special is as comforting as a wool blanket and a cashmere scarf. What better way to end a sumptuous meal at your favorite restaurant than with a glass of Louis XIII de Rémy Martin, the "King of Cognacs"? Or begin the evening with a Rémy Metropolitan before the curtain rises at Lincoln Center.

Glide off the ice at Wollman Rink and defrost with a sip or two from a thermos of Rémy Martin Hot Milk Punch. Continue the celebration of New York City Ballet's fiftieth anniversary with a glass of Rémy Martin VSOP on the rocks after the performance, or make an evening of swing dancing more memorable with a classic Rémy Sidecar cocktail.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with just settling in by the fire at the neighborhood cigar lounge while watching the dancing flames reflect in a snifter of Rémy Martin Extra. Or stay in for the evening, put Sinatra on the stereo, and uncork a bottle of the best Cognac the world has to offer. Then let it snow, let it snow, let it snow.

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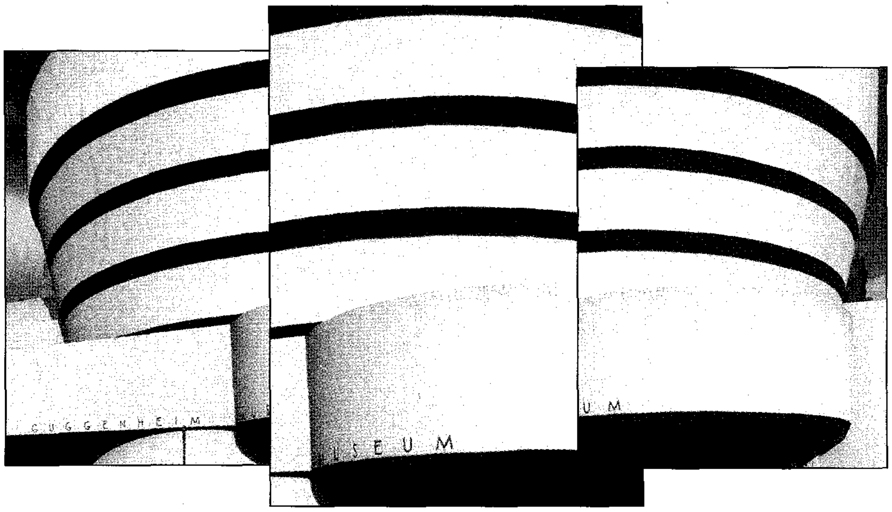


DOWNTIME IN A NEW YORK MINUTE

By the editors of "Fodor's New York City '99"

Whether you belong to the legions of business travelers who descend on the Big Apple every year or are one of millions of local worker bees, it's advisable to take an occasional break from the nine-to-five whirlwind of meetings, computer screens, and fax machines. Fodor's suggests several off-the-beaten-track refuges where you can repair for a brief respite.

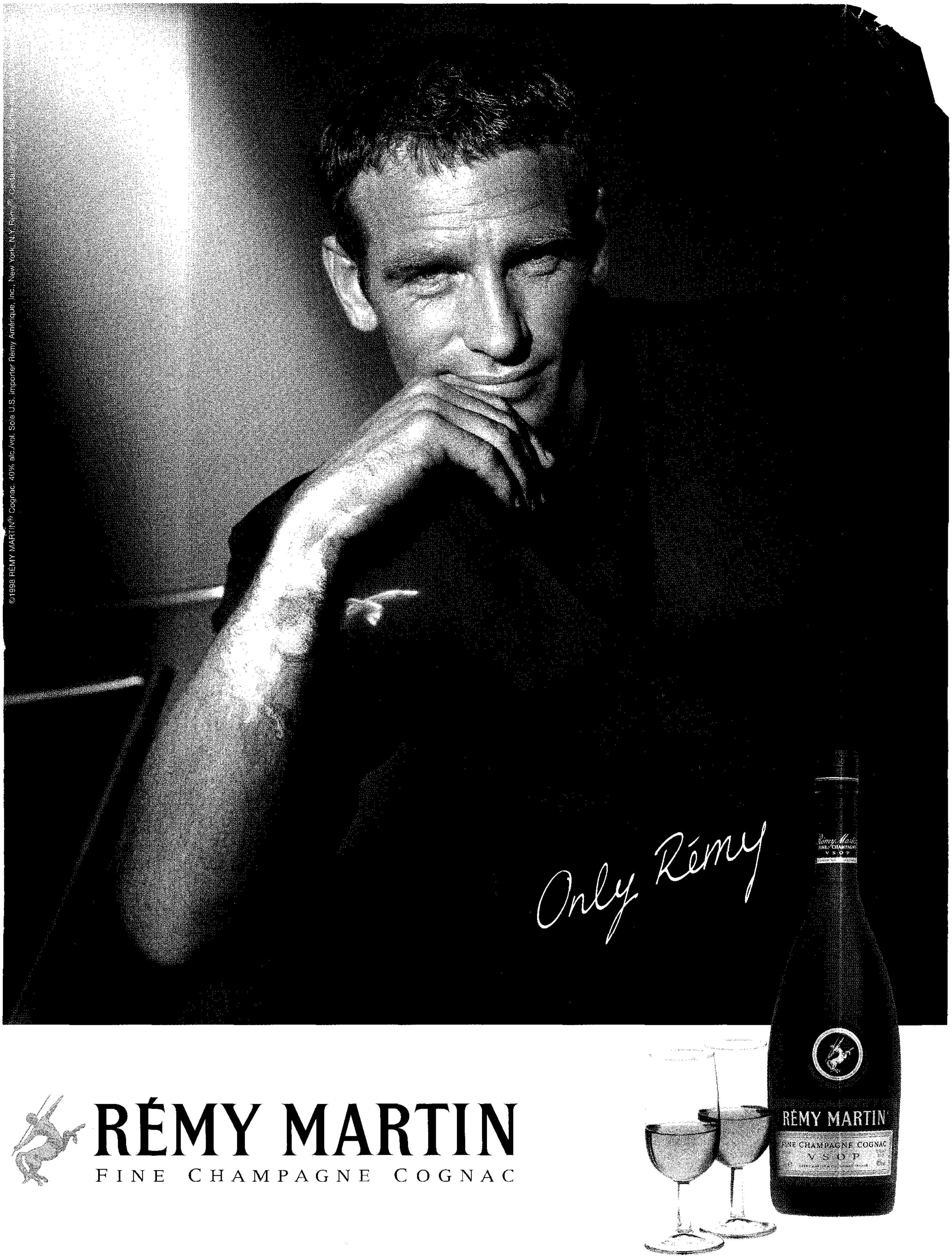
Beekman Place This secluded and exclusive two-block-long East Side enclave has an aura of unperturbably elegant calm. Residents of its refined town houses have included the Rockefellers, Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, Ethel Barrymore, Irving Berlin, and, of course, Auntie Mame, a character in the well-known Patrick Dennis memoir (later play and movie) of the same name. *Steps at 51st Street lead to an esplanade along the East River. East of First Avenue (between 49th and 51st streets).*

Sniffen Court Just two blocks from The Pierpont Morgan Library, ten Romanesque Revival former brick carriage houses—equal parts old London and New Orleans—line this easily overlooked cul-de-sac. Peer through the locked gate to admire the lovely buildings. *150-158 East 36th Street (between Lexington and Third avenues).*

Corporate-Sponsored Exhibits Though it's not Museum Mile, midtown does benefit from companies that use part of their space to present free public exhibits. **The Paine Webber Art Gallery** hosts four exhibits a year in the lobby of the Paine Webber Building. *1285 Avenue of the Americas (between 51st and 52nd streets), 212-713-2885. Weekdays 8 A.M. - 6 P.M.* **The Equitable Gallery** has an enormous Roy Lichtenstein work in its atrium and changing exhibits. *787 Seventh Avenue (between 51st and 52nd streets), 212-554-4818. Weekdays from 11 A.M. - 6 P.M. and Saturday from noon - 5 P.M.*

Museum of American Financial History On the site of Alexander Hamilton's law offices (later the Standard Oil Building), this one-room museum displays artifacts of the financial market's history, including vintage ticker-tape machines and the only surviving stretch of ticker tape from "Black Tuesday," October 29, 1929—the worst crash in the stock market's history. *28 Broadway (just north of Bowling Green Park) 212-908-4519. Weekdays from 11:30 A.M. - 3:30 P.M., or group tours by appointment.*

Nicholas Roerich Museum An 1898 Upper West Side town house is the site of this small, eccentric museum dedicated to the work of Russian artist Nicholas Roerich, who emigrated to New York in 1920 and quickly developed an ardent following. Some two hundred of his paintings hang here—notably some spiritually evocative canvases of the Himalayas. He also designed sets for Diaghilev ballets, such as the "Rite of Spring," original sketches of which are also on view. *319 West 107th Street, 212-864-7752. Tuesday-Sunday from 2 P.M. - 5 P.M.*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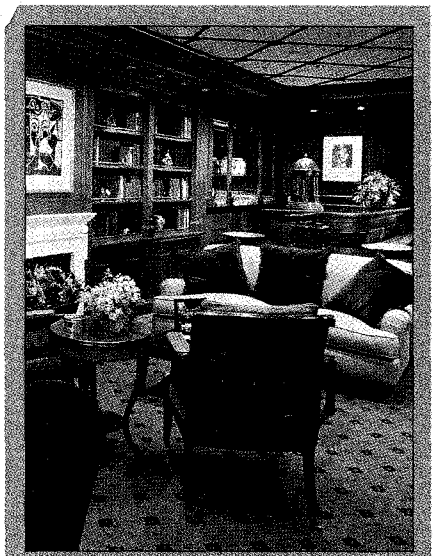

Michael's Club on the Century.

New York reigns as the quintessential high court of culture with its preeminent fine art, lavish entertainment, and extravagant luxuries. Accustomed to such an embarrassment of riches, how do New Yorkers cope when they venture away from their sophisticated citadel?

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But the profusion of masterworks aboard Celebrity Cruises is not all that rivals Gotham. Epicurean pleasures abound. Award-winning cuisine has been created by master chef Michel Roux. Celebrity suites are enhanced by butler service that is refined and attentive. Sea breezes mingle with the delicate aroma of fresh-cut flowers. Urban tensions dissolve in warm jet massages from the Thalassotherapy seawater pool or *rasul*, a unique AquaSpa™ herbal and seaweed treatment. In the evening, there's theatre, a cigar lounge, martini, champagne and caviar bars.

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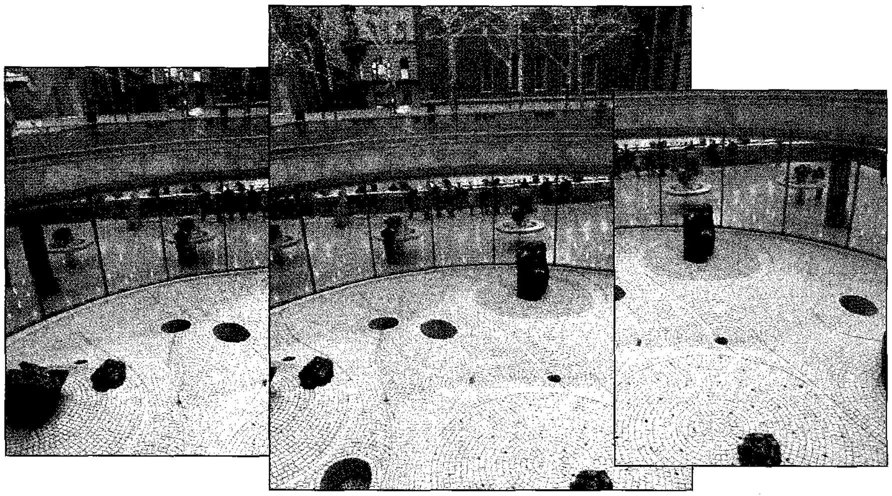

Chase Plaza

ARE YOU IN THE KNOW? FODOR'S QUIZ SHOW

By the editors of "Fodor's upCLOSE New York City"

Think fast: Do you know how Manhattan and Wall Street got their names? Or that a surprising number of our nation's celebrities hail from Brooklyn? Or where the United Nations is located? (Hint: It's not in New York.) Read on.

- Manhattan may have come from the Munsee Indian word *manahachtanienk* meaning "island of general inebriation." Apparently, when Henry Hudson landed in New York in 1609, he broke out the spirits and the locals all became intoxicated.

- The ornate stone carvings on the facade of The Cathedral of St. John the Divine feature the usual saints and biblical scenes, plus a few modern details—like a tiny Manhattan skyline being destroyed by a nuclear bomb.

- Founded in 1945, the United Nations occupies land that is the domain of no nation—when you're there, you aren't really in New York. Rather, you're on land that belongs to the U.N.'s 185 member states and which has its own security force and fire department.

- Many of New York's finest chefs come to purchase farm-fresh produce, bread, cheese, and fruit at the Union Square Greenmarket.

- Herman Melville was born at 6 Pearl Street and worked as a customs officer for The Port of New York long after writing "Moby Dick."

- Back in 1653, when hostile Indian territory started around 40th Street, Dutch settlers built a protective wooden stockade around the northern outskirts of their settlement. The colony grew so quickly that they bagged the wall in 1699, but the name stuck to the street that followed. Today, Wall Street is less than a mile long and not much wider than an alley.

- It is said that one in every seven Americans can trace their roots back to Brooklyn. Consider this (very incomplete) list of famous Brooklynites, past and present: George Gershwin, Lena Horne, Mae West, Spike Lee, Barbara Stanwyck, Shelly Winters, Barbra Streisand, Danny Kaye, Richard Dreyfuss, Mickey Rooney, Maurice Sendak, Woody Allen, Neil Simon, Max Roach, Joan Rivers, Harvey Fierstein, Jackie Gleason, Harry Houdini, Mary Tyler Moore, Woody Guthrie, Arthur Miller, Sandy Koufax, Isaac Asimov, and Mel Brooks.

- To eat in all 16,000 of New York's restaurants, you'd have to visit three a day for more than fourteen years—at which point you'd have to start all over again because thousands of new restaurants will have flung open their doors.

GUIDE TO THE GUIDES

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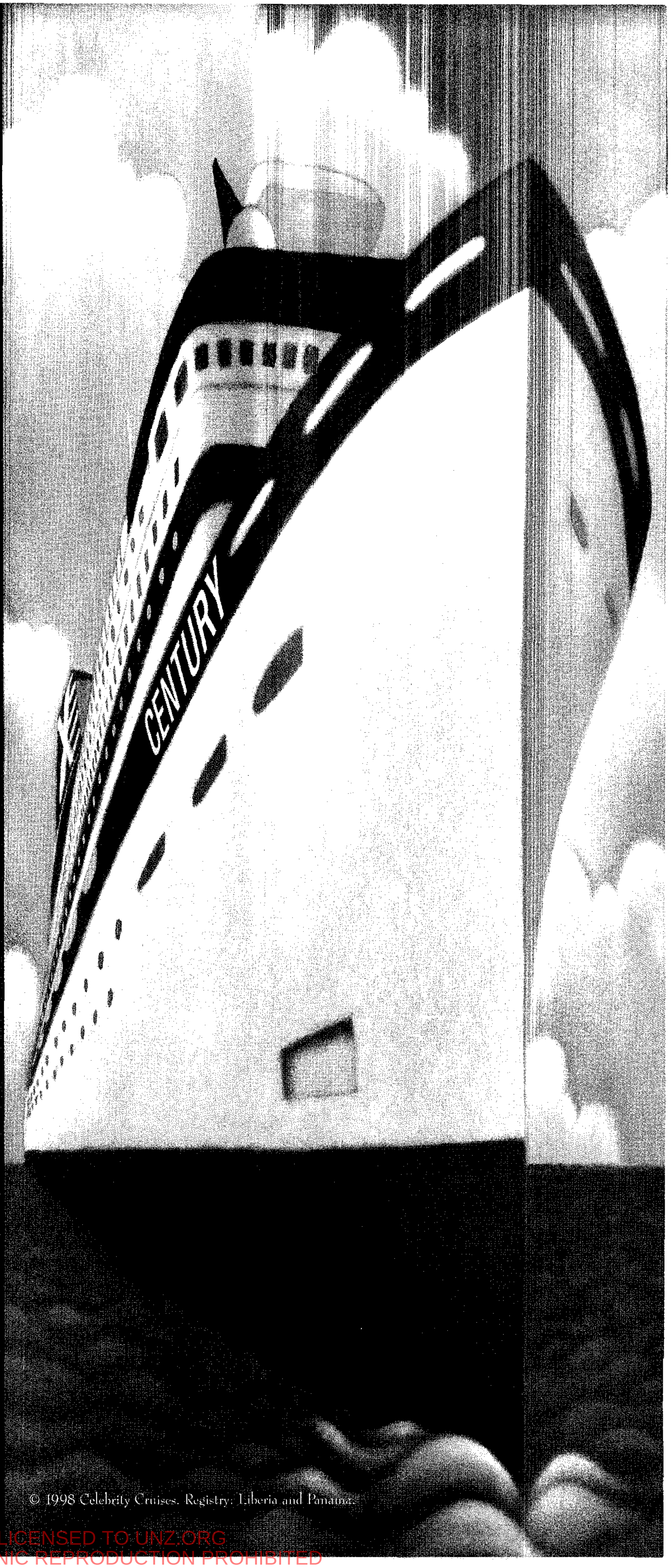

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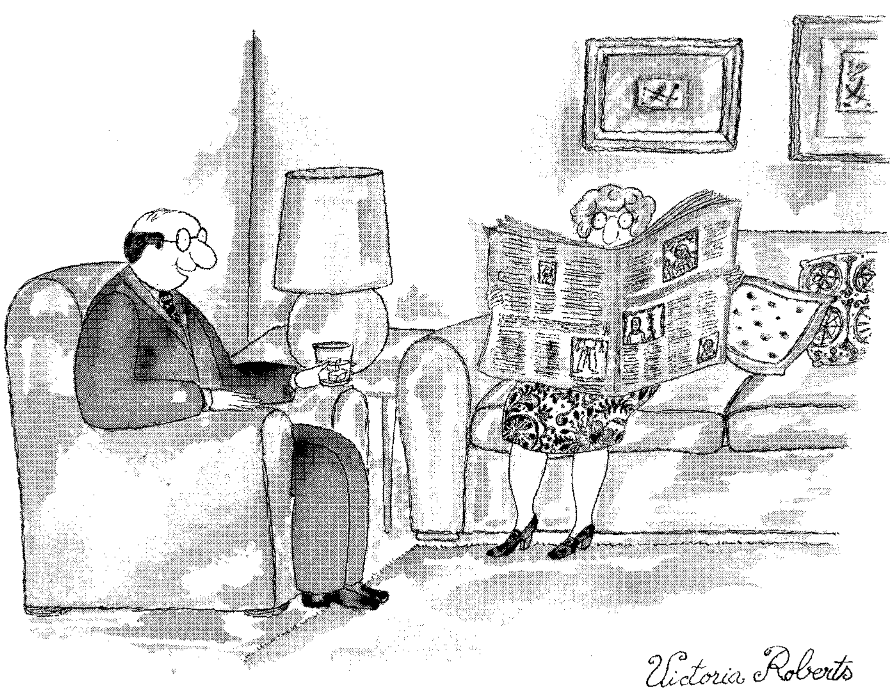

"Perhaps if we could think of me sitting here as an art installation, that would help."

like a total different world." Dil's parents were "not too proud" of that outside world, but her attitude was "If they're not, they shouldn't have come to America."

So Dil and her father quarrelled—about the friends she hung out with, her hours on the phone, the length of time she spent out of the home, the clothes she wore, and the movies she saw. And they quarrelled, more abstractly, about their own quarrels—about obedience and rebellion, about trust and distrust, and about each other's stubbornness. They had been quarrelling for so many years that Dil doubted whether they knew anymore how to have any other kind of conversation.

On a Saturday night shortly before I met Dil, her father had picked her up after work at Sears, where she holds a part-time job on weekends. Dil had recently bought a computer, and her father, who had heard about cybersex and triple-X electronic chat rooms, was alarmed. She told him that her computer could block pornography, but he wasn't mollified; he wanted her to renounce E-mail altogether. "And then you go to these parties," he said. Dil couldn't deny that she'd been at a party the night before until eleven-thirty. "You keep this up," her father told her, "and you're going to lose a father."

At that, Dil had burst into tears. "How could you?" she said. Her father protested that she'd misunderstood him, and before long he, too, started crying. When they got home, Dil recalled, "He was so extra nice to me. He was like, 'O.K., O.K., O.K., O.K., I'm sorry, sweetie, I love you, I only want the best for you.' And I'm like, 'I know what's best for me, Dad.' And he's like, 'Yeah, but the world today—it's not you, it's the people around you.' " And it was then that her father told her it was time: "You're coming of age," he said. "We've got to get you married off."

Dil said she was not going to get married, and her father said that was nonsense. He already had his eye on a certain "boy," and he told Dil that he meant to start negotiations. She knew the candidate—the brother-in-law of one of her cousins—and she said she wasn't interested in him. "He looks like a good boy," her father said. "He's studying to be an engineer, and he has a great personality." Dil contended that the only words this boy had ever exchanged with her father were "Hi, Uncle. Bye, Uncle. Oh, hi, how are you?" and she said, "You consider that a great personality?" Her father reminded her that the boy was good-looking. Dil didn't care. "That's not what it's

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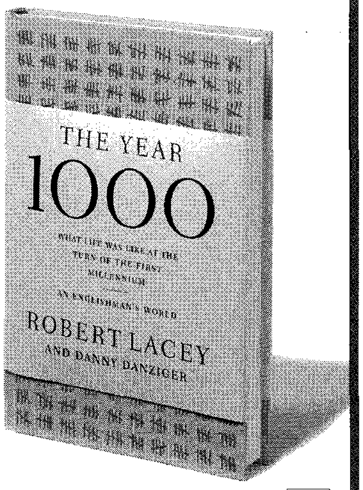

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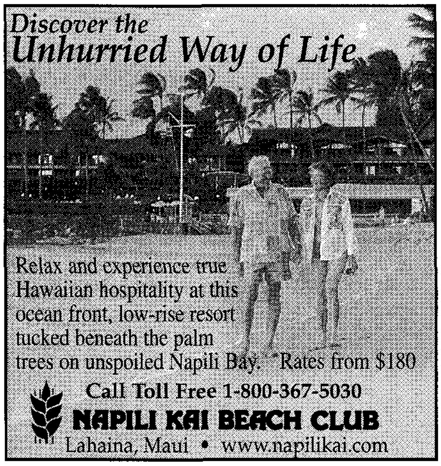
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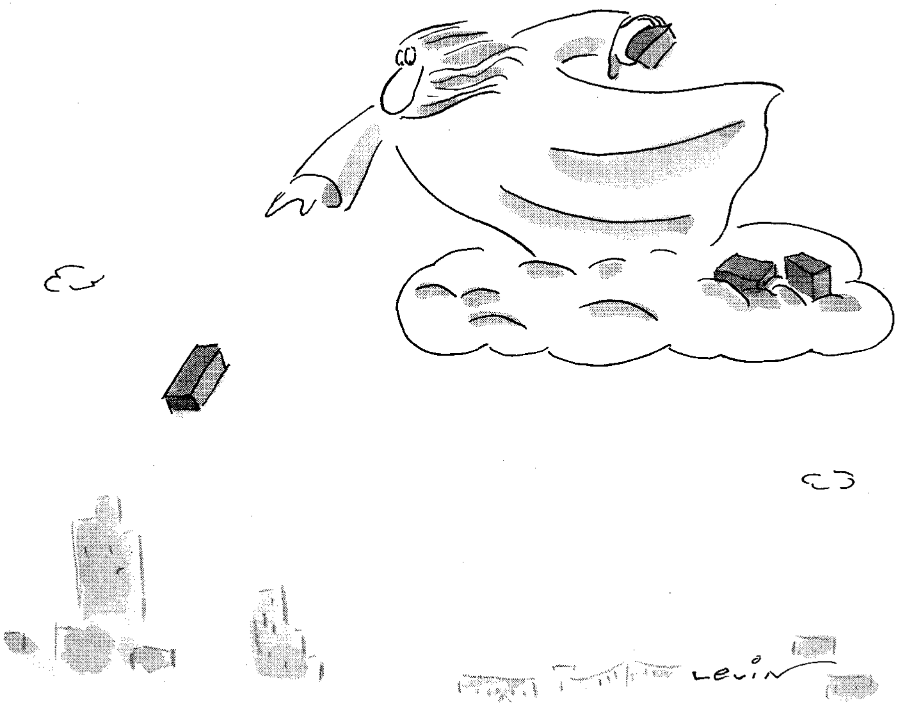
all about," she told me. "How do I know that he hasn't had, like, three hundred girlfriends that he's been doing it with?"

Her father's talk of marriage rattled her. "My mind," she said. "It feels—it's like that Y2K computer bug—like my life's been programmed to go just so far and then get stuck." Her final exams were approaching, and although she had always been an A student, she now asked, Why bother? "What am I doing in college if I'm just going to be a housewife?" One day in the middle of the week, Dil surprised herself by crying for hours. She said, "I cried and cried like somebody had been murdered in front of me."

AROUND the time I met Dil, I went to the American Place Theatre, near Times Square, to see "Sakina's Restaurant," a play written and performed by Aasif Mandvi, an immensely versatile thirty-two-year-old actor, who was born in Bombay and grew up in Yorkshire, England, and Tampa, Florida. The show is a series of interlocking monologues. In the course of the evening, with the help of a few modest props and the sparest of costume changes, Mandvi changes his voice and rearranges his body to inhabit six characters—the father, the mother, the son, the daughter, the daughter's fiancé, and an employee—of an Indian family that lives in the East Village and runs a restaurant on the curry corridor of Sixth Street. The play is driven by its raw and relentless voices; it doesn't follow a plot so much as it describes the condition of living in the immigrant limbo between cultures. And at its center is a drama of arranged marriage.

In one scene, Sakina, the daughter in Mandvi's stage family, tells her American boyfriend, after a sloppy kiss, about the match her parents have arranged for her: "When I was seven, my dad, yeah he gave me this picture of this guy that they betrothed me to, and I just kept it. Because, because I didn't know I was gonna meet anybody. When you're young and geeky with a funny name and your mom makes you wear harem pants and braids every day, it's hard to imagine that you're ever gonna meet anyone." In a later scene, Mandvi becomes Ali, Sakina's betrothed, a pre-med student on the eve of a major exam, who has momentarily shrugged off his usual Islamic rigor and is visiting an American prostitute. In a sort of mock-Dostoyevskian torment, Ali spends his time with the woman denouncing premarital sex and intercultural relationships, and praising Sakina as "the perfect girl for me—from a very similar family, same religion, same tradition, same values." At last, the prostitute takes charge, doing unto Ali as the intern did unto the President, and while he builds toward his pantomimed climax Ali fantasizes that he has released himself from his life:

> Well, if I'm not going to be a doctor, I wonder what I will be. Maybe I will be a



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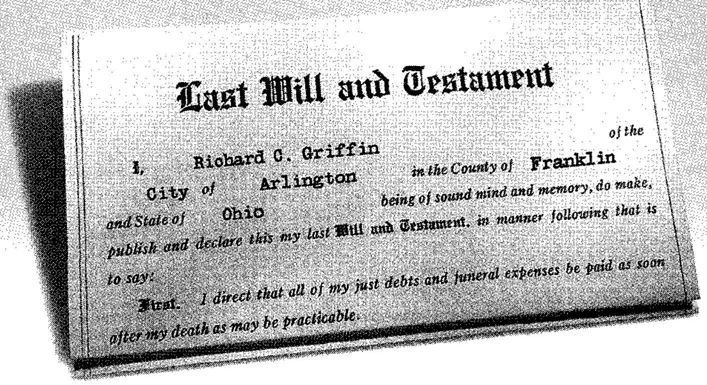

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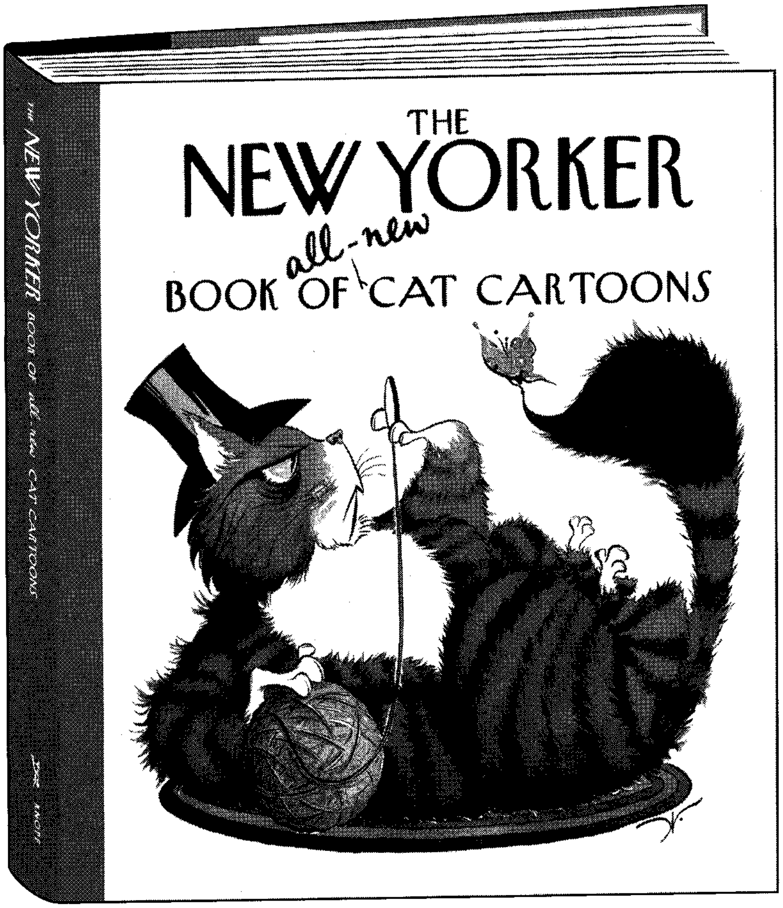
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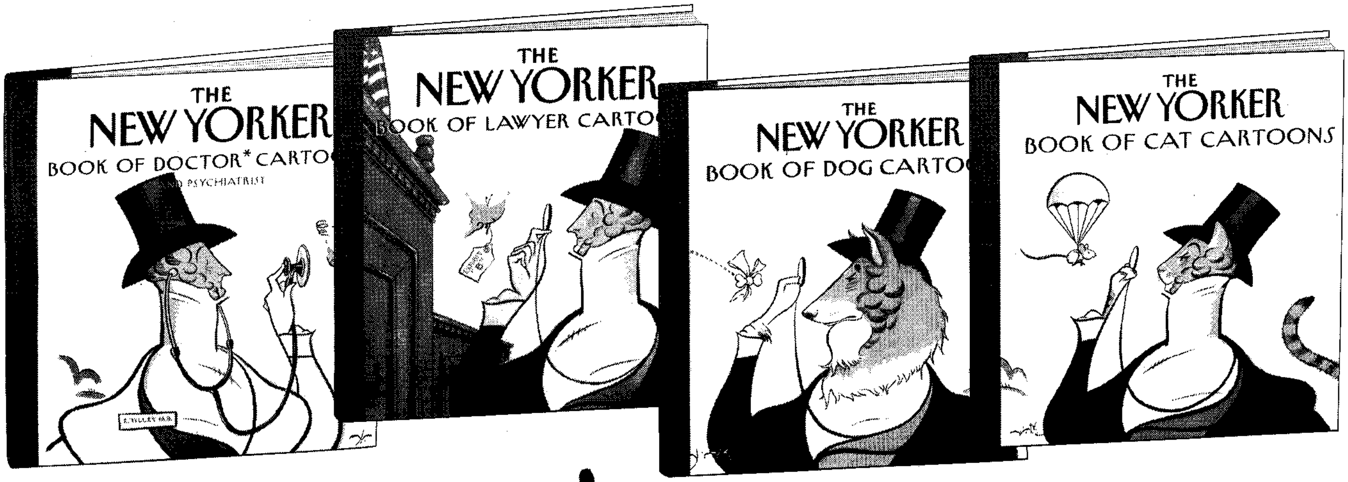
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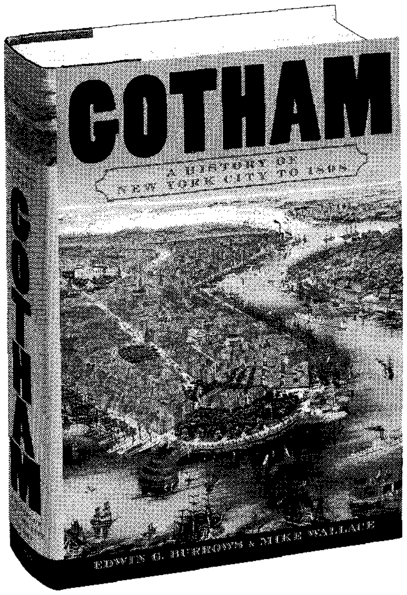
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bum! And Sakina will say, "I can't marry him, he's a *bum!*" And I will say, "Good! Because this bum wouldn't marry you when hell freezes over!" And her parents will say, "How dare you talk to our daughter like that!" And I will say, "I just did!" And my parents will say, "How dare you talk to her parents like that, you are a great disappointment," and I will say, "Mom, Dad, eat shiiit!"

As Mandvi concluded this outburst, I turned to peek at two evidently prosperous middle-aged Indian couples seated near me. When they entered the theatre, the men buttoned up in tweed suits, the women draped in saris, they had looked stern and distinctly unamusable. Now they were shaking with laughter, the men openmouthed, the women with their hands over their mouths. They kept right on laughing through the next scene, as Sakina's younger brother, in India for his grandmother's funeral, threw a tantrum. "Everyone in this country is stupid!" he cried, clutching a Nintendo Game Boy. "And they just want all my cool stuff, 'cause they don't have any cool stuff of their own, and they're just jealous, 'cause we get to live in America and they're stuck here in ugly, smelly old India, and I never, ever, ever wanna come back here ever."

Mandvi later told me that last June, when "Sakina's Restaurant" opened, he expected to be "inundated with criticism" from the Indian-American community; instead, the show's run was extended for months on end. Mandvi took his play's popularity as evidence of the community's growing confidence in its standing as an integral part of a new American mix. Indian-Americans enjoy the highest education level and the highest average income of any new immigrant group, and at least as many live in Westchester County and suburban New Jersey as in Queens. "Such prosperity," Mandvi said, "allows people to come and laugh and say, 'Oh, yes, those are some of our characteristic peculiarities, but we're doing pretty well.'"

At the same time, even the wealthiest Indian immigrants resist being absorbed by what Mandvi calls the "alien" American culture of "individualism and pursuit of the heart." Most likely, such absorption is only a matter of generations, as it has been for the children of past immigrants. But then, as Dil said to me, "What comfort is that? I really don't care about history right now. I want to know how my life is going to be."

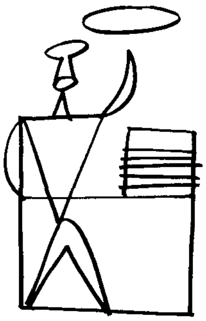
Dil has a sister named Gulshir (Gul for short), who was born in India and is seven years older. At the age of fifteen, Gul won admission to the Brooklyn Technical High School, but she could not go, because her father refused to let her ride the subway. Gul, who is smaller than Dil, and talks just as volubly but with less excitement, recalled her father's edicts without regret when I met her recently at the family's apartment in Lefrak City. As she was growing up, she said, she had "only one best friend," who was also the daughter of Indian immigrants, and lived just across the Long Island Expressway, in Rego Park. "Hema was her name," Gul said, and since third grade, "If Gul was there, you knew Hema was there, and if Hema was there you knew Gul was not far behind." Forgoing Brooklyn Technical meant staying with Hema, and after high school Gul and her friend went together to New York University. Then, in the summer of 1991, following negotiations conducted by her father, Gul married a young Urdu-speaking Muslim Indian-American, and went to live with him in New Jersey.

Gul was eighteen at the time, and she told me, "I got married on the Fourth of July, and it's true that I gained independence from my parents with my marriage. I gained independence because my husband gave it to me. After marriage, if I wanted to go out with my friends and stay out in the evening and have a life, he said, 'O.K.' But when I was at home, if my last class was over at six I had to be home at seven. My father would not have it any other way."

Gul had her first child, a son, who is now almost four, immediately after graduating from college. Then she went back to N.Y.U. to get a master's degree in special education, and two years ago she had twins (a second son and a daughter). Her husband works in the garment trade, and he has also opened a liquor store next to her father's beverage store. Gul teaches at her children's nursery school, although her husband likes to remind her that she does not have to work, because he is successful. Late last year, the couple and their children moved into a big house they had renovated in New Jersey—"gorgeous," Dil told me, with "a Jacuzzi and all these nice skylights."

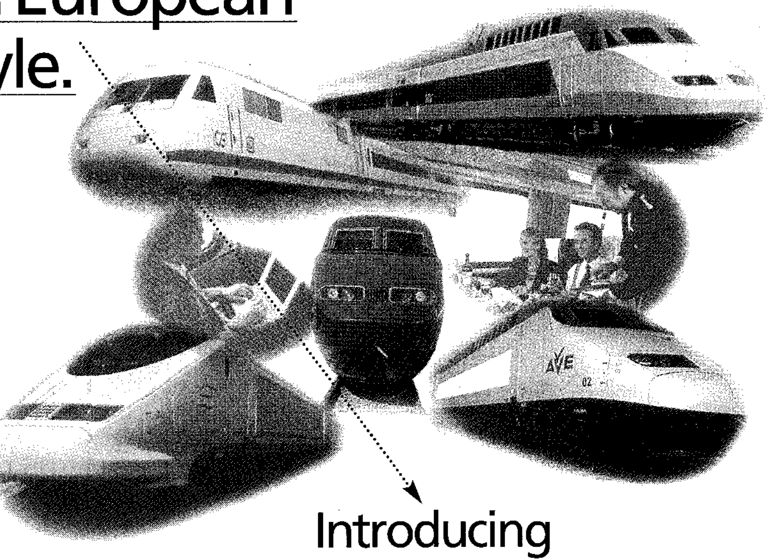
Dil considers Gul's situation to be as good an arranged marriage as she has seen, yet she wouldn't trade places with her sister. Gul had been Dil's dearest childhood companion. When they were together, they never spoke Urdu, only English, and until Gul's wedding they always slept in the same bed. "I would make her laugh and laugh and laugh and laugh," Dil said, "and she was like, 'You know what? Sometimes I wish you were a guy—and older, you know. I would marry you in a second.' " For Dil, "To let Gul go was, like, oh, my God, you're alone." Suddenly, she was the sole focus of her parents' attention, and she felt, "I have to defend myself." The feelings were inchoate at the time, but Dil had thrown a fit when Gul's future in-laws came over to finalize the terms of the marriage: she'd run into the bathroom and threatened a hunger strike unless the wedding was called off. "Can you believe that?" she said. "Here's a little twelve-year-old locking herself in the bathroom, wailing on top of her lungs, saying, 'No!' " Dil laughed, remembering her younger self inflamed. Later, she said, "The way we were brought up, in my family, me and my sister, so strict, everything prim and proper, you never talked back to adults. It felt like it cured me, I'm telling you."

So the shock of being separated from her sister had uncorked Dil's voice. It was, of course, an American voice of the first-generation variety, driven as much by the "no" of dissent as by its assertive frontiersmanship. And, listening to Dil, I was struck by the innocent surety with which she recounted her experiences and perceptions. She had the habit of punctuating her speech with the phrases "That's how it is" and "That's how I am." The decisiveness of these refrains carried at once a sense of fatality and of defiance, and in that they were true reflections of Dil's struggle against the parameters of her inheritance. In her father's eyes, Dil's wish to choose her relationship to Indian culture amounted to a rejection of it: when he warned her that she risked losing him, he meant that, in a fiercely insular family, if you asked to be left alone you just might be.



IN April of 1993, Gul's childhood friend Hema became engaged to her high-school sweetheart, Shaleen, who was himself the child of Indian immigrants. The two had kept their romance quiet as it flourished at N.Y.U., where they were both brilliant students; then, when Shaleen was accepted on a full scholarship to N.Y.U. medical school, he told his father his wish and the marriage was arranged. The wedding was scheduled for mid-July.

May 27th was Shaleen's twenty-first birthday, and the night before, at around eleven-thirty, the doorbell rang at the house where he lived, with his parents, in Manhasset, Long Island. The family had gone to bed, but Shaleen was still awake. When he opened the door, he saw a fat Indian man holding a MAK-90 semi-automatic rifle. Shaleen slammed the door, and the gunman opened fire. Bullets



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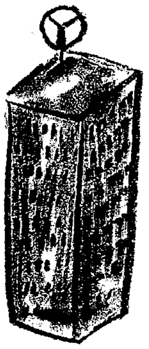
ripped through the door, and Shaleen fell dead in the hallway.

Gul learned of Shaleen's killing the next evening, and she went straight to Hema's apartment, in Rego Park. She found her friend's family watching the news of the crime on television. Hema, she told me, was inaccessibly remote—"lifeless." Gul stayed with her through the night, sleeping on the floor, and in the morning she told Hema, "Let me go home and freshen up, and I'll be back." On her way out of Rego Park, she picked up a newspaper and saw a photograph on the front page of Hema and Shaleen cutting the cake at their engagement party. At Lefrak City, she ate the breakfast her mother had prepared, and changed her clothes. Then a friend called. "Did you hear?" the friend asked. "She jumped."

Hema had lived on the sixteenth floor. "She was talking to her mother," Gul told me. "The phone rang. Her mother turned to get it. She took off her glasses, put them on the table, and jumped." Gul rushed back to Rego Park, and the first thing Hema's mother said to her was "Why did you leave?"

A few hours after Hema's suicide, Shaleen's murderer was charged. He was a thirty-five-year-old married man named Chandran Nathan, who worked for the city as an actuary, and he confessed immediately that he had killed Shaleen. Chandran Nathan was a longtime friend of Hema's family, who had become unhinged by a fantasy that he and Hema shared a special connection. It was his delusion that Shaleen was being forced on her in an arranged marriage, and he seemed to believe that he had acted chivalrously on Hema's behalf. His original intention, he told the police, had been "to wound and scare" Shaleen, so that "he would go away and leave her alone."



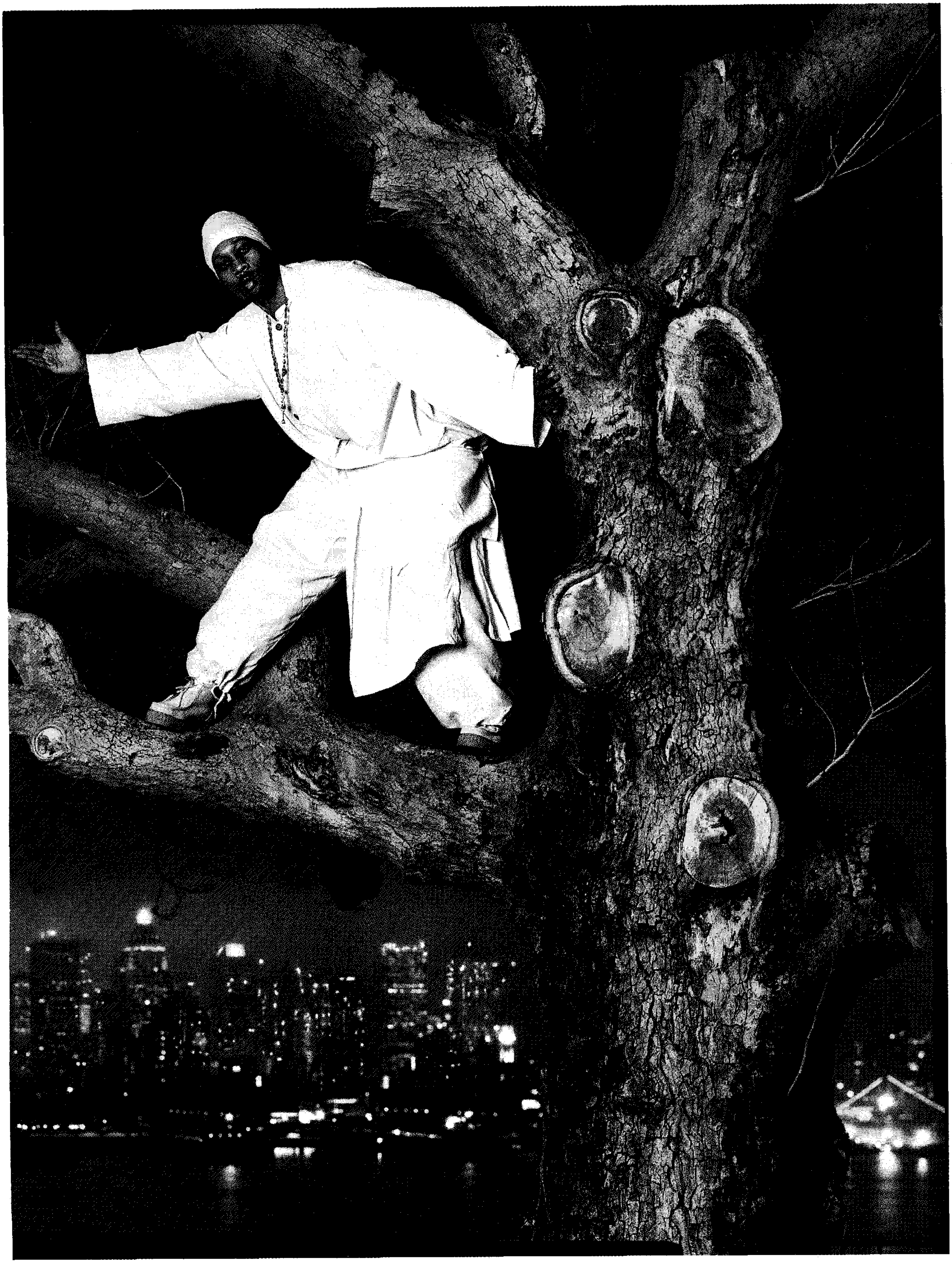
The day after Chandran Nathan's confession, Hema and Shaleen were laid out side by side in their coffins, wearing the finery that had been intended for their wedding day—a red sari for her, a jewelled turban for him—and they were married symbolically, according to a Hindu ceremony, with a length of orange silk tied between them. Then they were cremated. The front page of the *Post* read, "TOGETHER FOREVER."

Several reporters stressed that Hema's suicide was a desperate act of passion, but Gul understood it as a reflection on her culture. "This community is driven by gossip," she told me, adding that Hema could have expected "her fiancé's family to look at her as bad luck, because it was her family friend that killed their son." And after that, Gul said, "Who would marry her? Nobody would marry her. Her life was over. So she ended it."

Dil interpreted the story of Hema and Shaleen differently. "They were in love with each other," she told me. "I mean, they found each other. And look what happened. So are we not to have love in this life?"

DIL has heard that when she was born her father had hoped for a son, and she told me it would certainly be easier, in her parents' culture, to be a guy. "I'd have my way," she said. "They wouldn't be so strict as they are now. I would be able to go to parties and I would be able to ignore them, and they'd still give me the same love." Sometimes when Dil stayed out late, she would come home to hear her father telling her mother, "Who knows what the hell she's doing? She's probably out screwing some guy." Dil described her mother as a conciliator in family conflicts, someone who would say, "She is your daughter, how could you say that?" On the other hand, Dil said, "If I was a guy, and I would be screwing half the world, it wouldn't look good, but—'Hey, he's a guy,' you know?"

A guy, Dil said, "can do anything he wants and still come out the winner," but "girls are looked at as such delicate God knows what—if they drop, you know, they'll break." Gul told me that a girl could become a woman only by getting married, or else, by the age of twenty-five, she would be considered "an old maid," at which point "anybody you can get you should grab." Dil knew the rules, and she said, "I have all these analogies for it." For instance, she told me, you could think of girls like fruit in a fruit market. "They're nice and ripe up until a certain day, and then after that they start to rot, and no one's going to buy a rotted fruit. No matter how cheap you sell it for, only the flies will go after it." She laughed, and said, "That's really how it is."



his six-hundred-thousand-dollar salary and his apartment near Lincoln Center for six nickels and a cardboard box on Amsterdam Avenue. His monologue of refusal lasted five adamant minutes. Then he leaned across the table and grinned a steely grin, first at me and then at his third wife, Jean. Jean widened her eyes just a little, a marital signal, I figured, that said, "Could you lay off? Why are you whacking this guy in the knees? For fun?"

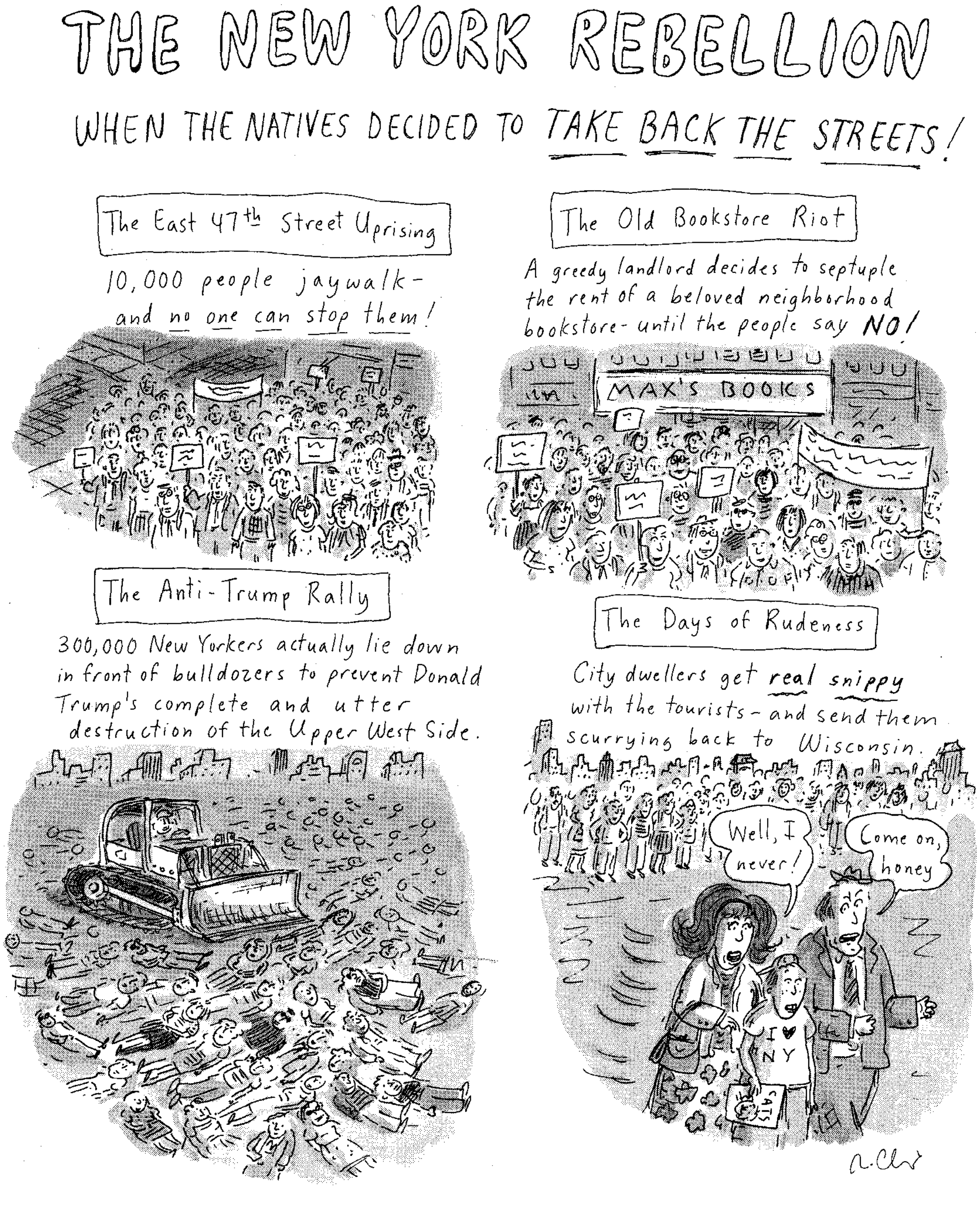
Volpe leaned back in his chair and folded his arms across his chest. "My wife thinks I'm being confrontational," he said. "Am I being confrontational, dear?"

With this aria concluded, and Jean, a former dancer in the Met ballet corps, gone off to powder her nose, Volpe returned to Dr. Jekyll mode. He seemed to assume that I had enjoyed his Mr. Hyde riff as much as he had.

As a figure of authority in New York, Volpe is not entirely alone in this style of management. Often, when I spoke with other people at the Met or in the snug community of critics, agents, and buffs that surrounds it, I heard him compared, for better and ill, to Rudolf Giuliani. As I was beginning to learn, the comparison was not far-fetched: like the Mayor (who, as it happens, is a fairly frequent and very enthusiastic guest at the Met), Volpe has an inarguable record of fiscal and organizational efficiency, and the sterling box-office record of the theatre has provided him with a secure sense that everything he does, even the tantrums, the withering sarcasm, is worthy of repeat performances.

"My wife says my bark is worse than my bite," Volpe said when the coffee was served. "I tell her not to tell anyone. It's bad for business."

VOLPE'S name first came up as a candidate to lead the Met in 1989, when Bruce Crawford, who is still the president of the board of directors, decided to step down as the general manager and accept a lucrative offer to return to private business. Crawford and other supporters saw Volpe, who was now running the entire backstage as well as negotiations with the union, as a man of long experience with a necessary toughness. Volpe had no gift for artistic decisions—with casting, singing, staging, or dramaturgy—yet he knew the theatre better than anyone and brought something to the Met which is rare in the opera world—common sense. A majority of the Met's board of directors, however, regarded him as too coarse to lead the Met. He was too unschooled, too much the striver. Volpe, after all, had taken Dale Carnegie courses to improve himself. That was simply too much. "It really was a matter of style," Crawford said. "The board is made up of people who've given a lot of money. They want to stand next to someone who is very elegant and they think of the days of Rudy Bing. . . . The idea of working up from a stagehand—there were people who didn't think that was a great idea."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They didn't say much about him. It wasn't the word 'brash'—it was just that he didn't have the stature."

Bing was alive, though he suffered from Alzheimer's. He came down from his nursing home in the Bronx only rarely to visit Lincoln Center, yet Bing still seemed to haunt Volpe, even though he had been Volpe's enthusiastic promoter many years earlier. With his imperious European manners and his link to the days of Leonie Rysanek, Richard Tucker, Birgit Nilsson, Renata Tebaldi, and Maria Callas, Bing lived in the minds of many board members as their ideal, an image more than adequate to their fantasies of glamour and society and opening nights. Volpe did not. And so, after a yearlong search, the board chose an Englishman named Hugh Southern, but he immediately proved incompetent. Less than a year later, after the theatre had lost millions of dollars and fallen into organizational chaos, the board finally took Crawford's advice. They forced out Southern and turned to the stagehand. Volpe's appointment surprised many people in the opera world, not least because of its class meaning. "But you should not be surprised that he's gotten there: you are American!" Pavarotti told me. "It would never have happened in Italy, where I grew up."

Pavarotti is right, in the deepest, historical sense. The history of the Met's founding, in 1883, is a history of social ambition. The place began because the city's nouveaux riches had been excluded from the leading house of the day.

For a while, in the nineteenth century, the prospects for operatic life in New York were bleak. There had been opera from Castle Garden, near the Battery, to the Astor Place Opera House, but one after another the theatres closed. Henry James scoffed at the European pretensions of New Yorkers. "The moral," he remarked, "is that the flower of art blossoms only where the soil is deep."

New York society, however, was determined, and in 1854 the Academy of Music opened, at Fourteenth Street and Irving Place. Historians of opera in America, such as John Dizikes and Martin Mayer, have described the Academy in all its splendid dinginess: the sight lines were poor and the ventilation worse, but the sound was sublime. No one evoked the hall quite so famously as Edith Wharton, who opened "The Age of Innocence" by having her languid hero, Newland Archer, arrive at the theatre and meet his fiancée, May Welland:

> On a January evening of the early seventies, Christine Nilsson was singing in Faust at the Academy of Music in New York.
>
> Though there was already talk of the erection, in remote metropolitan distances "above the Forties," of a new Opera House which should compete in costliness and splendor with those of the great European capitals, the world of fashion was still content to reassemble every winter in the shabby red and gold boxes of the sociable old Academy. Conservatives cherished it for being small and inconvenient, and thus keeping out the "new people" whom New York was beginning to dread; and the sentimental clung to it for its historic associations, and the musical for its excellent acoustic.

The "new people" of the Gilded Age—the Vanderbilts, the Morgans, the Rockefellers, the Astors, and the Goulds—were eager to take part in the marriage of commerce and art. They hired architects to build French châteaus, Romanesque castles, and English manor houses along Fifth Avenue. They bought paintings, collected china and sculpture, and opened museums. At the opening of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, on Fifth Avenue, in 1880, one of their own, the lawyer Joseph Hodges Choate, urged on the upper classes, "Think of it—ye millionaires of many markets, what glory may be yours, if you only listen to our advice, to convert pork into porcelain, grain and produce into priceless pottery."

These same barons of Wall Street and their ambitious wives yearned to sit in the boxes alongside the Cuttings, the Beekmans, and the Belmonts at the Academy. But, as Dizikes writes in "Opera in America," there was no place for them—literally no place. Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt applied for a box at the Academy and was turned down. The event set off a meeting of the rebuffed and an appeal to the lords of the Academy. The old-money crowd agreed to give the parvenus some boxes, albeit in undesirable sites. This, of course, would not suffice, and so the idea for a new theatre in "the metropolitan distances" was conceived. A group of fifty-five families put up ten thousand dollars each, and the Metropolitan Opera was born. The Met's first impresario, Henry Abbey, lured Christine Nilsson away from the Academy and opened the new house on October 22, 1883. Nilsson sang the part of Marguerite in "Faust."

If J. P. Morgan ruled the city during the working day, Caroline Astor ruled, with equal authority, in the social evenings. Mrs. Astor gave her annual ball for the chosen four hundred of what was then known, simply, as Society; she held regular court at the Metropolitan Opera. Mrs. Astor arrived at the theatre wearing, among other accoutrements, a diamond "stomacher." While some noted that it was a *used* stomacher, it had evidently been used first by no less than Marie Antoinette, Queen of France.

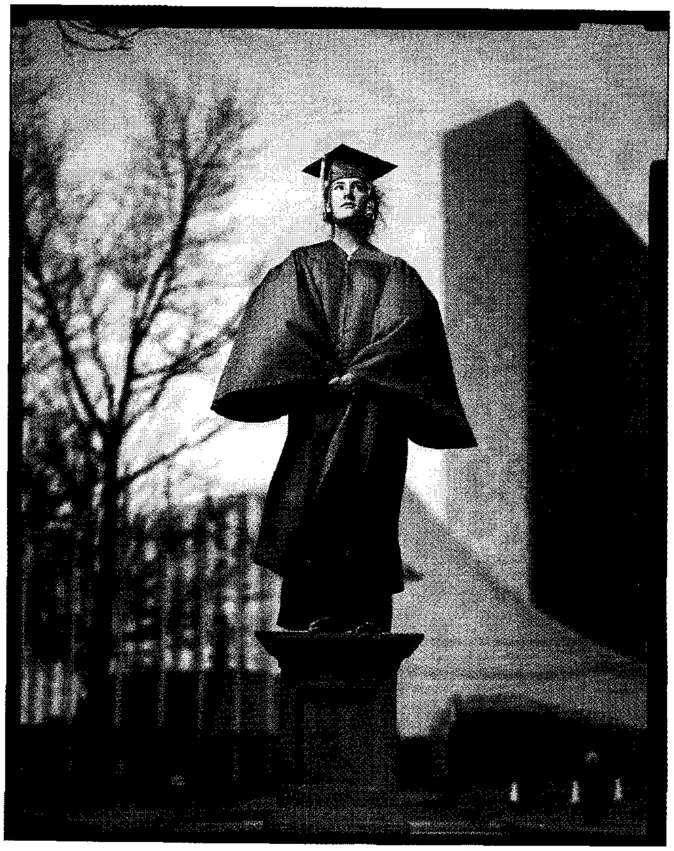
PRIVATE wealth is still the financial bulwark of the Met. Ticket sales account for less than half of the budget. But times, and wealth in New York, have changed profoundly. Volpe can no longer rely on old Dutch families and their flaking trusts to support the house. Alberto Vilar, a Cuban immigrant who made his money in high-tech investing, is Volpe's Vanderbilt. Vilar is the son of a sugar baron who lost his money in the Castro revolution. After going to high school in Puerto Rico, Vilar came to America, attended a small college in Pennsylvania, Washington and Jefferson, and made his way to Wall Street. He is now the president of Amerindo Investment Advisors, a billion-dollar firm that got that way because Vilar began putting money into high-tech stocks twenty years ago: Cisco, Intel, Microsoft.

In describing Vilar's devotion to the opera, it is not quite sufficient to enumerate his donations: twenty-five million dollars to the Met's endowment fund last year; backing for six new productions; and contributions to opera houses from Salzburg to St. Petersburg. His brand of devotion is the opera equivalent of the football fan who, on a subzero day, drives to East Rutherford, strips to his shorts, and paints himself Jets green. Vilar lives alone in a thirty-room apartment at United Nations Plaza. "No cat. No wife. No dog." He has decorated the place with a bust of Mozart, a bust of Don Giovanni, a dining-room ceiling that is a replica of the ceiling of the Mozarteum in Salzburg, and the same Austrian Lobmeyr snowflake chandeliers that rise to the ceiling before every performance at the Met. Vilar generally goes to close to a hundred opera performances a year, arranging his business schedule so that he can be at Glyndebourne, Bayreuth, Vienna, St. Petersburg, Monte Carlo, Salzburg, and New York at the operatically appropriate moments. Last year, he saw six "Turandot"s. Sometimes he brings a date to the opera. Sometimes he sits with a patron. Usually, he just goes alone.

"This is my life," Vilar told me over dinner one night at the Met's Grand Tier Restaurant—the Vilar Grand Tier. "I don't need to share it with somebody. That Chagall painting is like a mother to me. I've eked out a peace with that painting. At intermission, I make some notes, read a little. But then I hear a violin or a great voice and it envelops me, it possesses me." Of course, Vilar could have any box in the house; he sits in Row A in the orchestra, on the left aisle. "I can't see anything from the boxes."

Vilar is fifty-eight and looks rather like George Hamilton, only less so. He is as smooth as Volpe is rough. In his way, however, he is as blunt as the general manager. "I grew up in a Spanish-speaking home where machismo carried the day," Vilar said as we sat down. "From the time I was seven, all I wanted to do was listen to classical music, but my father said that no son of his was going to pursue such a thing. He refused to let me take violin lessons."

Out of resentment came obsession. "My goal is to be the largest single patron in the history of the Met," Vilar said. "Sybil Harrington, who died recently, gave the house twenty-six million dollars and a number of productions, but I believe I'll pass her if I haven't already." Generally speaking, Vilar likes Volpe, especially as an administrator—"He kicks ass and takes names." If he has a complaint, it has to do with gratitude. "I don't think the Met does enough in the way of patron recognition or appreciation," Vilar said. "You look at the ad for a Hollywood movie and there's this gigantic type: 'Joe Smith Presents.' Here, you look at the program for, say, 'The Marriage of Figaro,' and it starts with 'Libretto by . . .' Well, who cares who wrote the libretto? How about the guy who wrote the check?"



KIRSTEN GRAM WICKELGREN, *captain of the Stuyvesant High School math team, United Nations Plaza, January 25, 1999.*

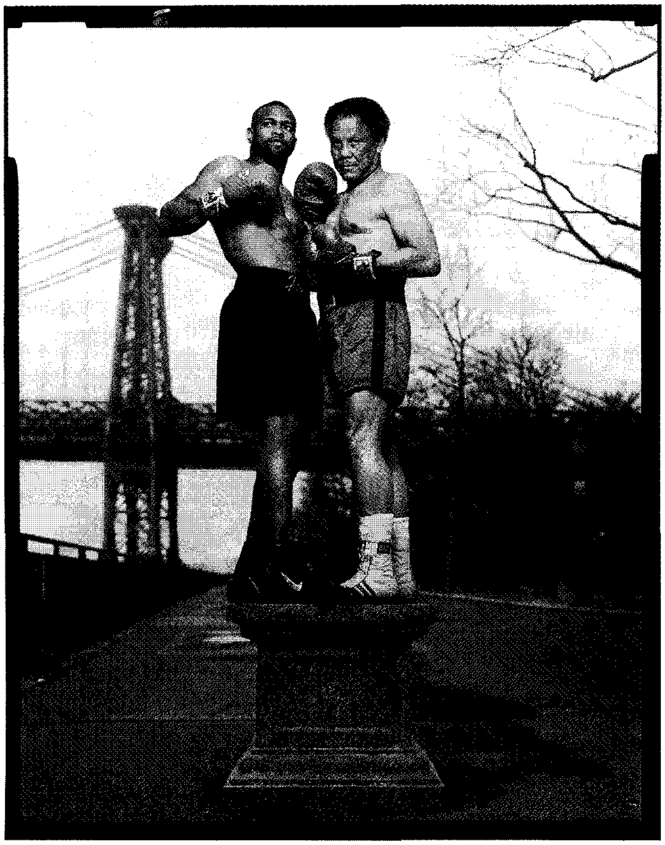
Vilar is an enormous fan of Zeffirelli's overstuffed sets: the endless curtains and mountains of pillows, the flocks of animals, the mobs of urchins. Vilar feels these displays are good value for the money. I asked him how he had reacted when the critics lobbed their grenades at Zeffirelli's new "Traviata," a production he backed with a two-million-dollar check.

"Look, I work on Wall Street, and that's one place where there's no bullshit," he said. "Every day at four o'clock you're either smart or you're an idiot. The applause meter is exact. I happen to love Zeffirelli. How come? Well, I'm wearing a Brioni suit tonight. It's thirty-five hundred bucks. I wear it because I like it. I believe that this is the Met, the Met does lavish things, and the best person for lavish is Franco Zeffirelli. If the guy at the *Times* didn't like 'Traviata,' then he ought to try fishing, because he missed his sport. The audience was happy.

"Last year, I was thinking of backing some Russian operas, but some others beat me to the punch," Vilar went on. "When I went to see 'Onegin,' well, if I had written the check, I'd have said, 'Where's the two million bucks?' It was bare bones. Robert Wilson's 'Lohengrin' grew on me, but if I'd written the check, I'd have been a little dubious. Where did the money go? I'm interested in lavish. Look at the second act of 'Turandot.' When the curtain opens and the audience applauds like mad, that's what I like to see."

After dinner, I sat with Vilar in his first-row seats for "La Bohème," one of the longest-running Zeffirelli productions in the repertory. I'm not sure I've ever seen a man look so content as Alberto Vilar did as the curtain opened for the second act on a Paris street scene, complete with a cast of hundreds, a donkey, and a horse.

"I can't write checks to help the starving in Biafra. That's the government's job," he said. "I'm helping people in this country enjoy opera. Show me a philanthropist in this country who gives to the homeless. They don't do it. They give



ROY JONES, JR., AND JOSE TORRES, *present and former light-heavyweight champions, Williamsburg Bridge, January 29, 1999.*

to something that's important to them."

In addition to bankrolling more productions, Vilar said he'd like to provide more toilets ("especially for the women"), a refurbished stage, an expanded lobby, and perhaps a more felicitous way to display the two Chagall panels.

"I could sit back now and give away nine-figure sums for a while," he said, "but I'd like to make even more money and just give it away. I know how to make money, so I'm hoping to do well and create my legacy."

THERE is no one in the opera world who disputes Volpe's success as an administrator. Not Vilar, not the board, not even the critics. Since Volpe's appointment, in 1990, he has straightened out the theatre's finances and its notoriously tortured labor relations. In order to break even, the Met must on the average fill ninety-one per cent of the seats at its two hundred and ten performances. And it does.

The more complicated issue is the Met's artistic level. Although the Met has been described as resolutely square, too big, and too dependent on conservative donors for real innovation (it's the General Motors of opera houses, according to Jonathan Miller, the British polymath, who has directed Janáček, Mozart, and Debussy there), Volpe and his colleagues contend that the theatre does what it does better than any other house in the world. There's a lot to their argument: there are good nights and bad nights, bombs and mediocrities, but no major opera—not La Scala in Milan, not San Francisco or the Lyric Opera of Chicago, not Covent Garden in London, not Vienna or Berlin—has anywhere near the varied repertory and consistent quality of the Met. The Met chorus is excellent and, under Levine, the Met orchestra is not merely recognized as the best anywhere; it's also a major symphony orchestra in its own right. From its inception, in 1883, and especially since the establishment of the smaller City Opera in the fifties, the Met has always been about stars and spectacle, and it has the means to pay for both. The Met's budget is three or four times that of its nearest rivals in the United States, San Francisco and Chicago.

"I think there is no doubt that the Metropolitan is the best opera house in the world," Plácido Domingo told me. "This is a huge machine with the performance at its heart, and it works like clockwork. Without a doubt, it's the best."

That is Domingo's opinion, of course. It is not everyone's. I've been going to the Met a lot lately (sometimes in Box 15, Volpe's box). Seeing so much Verdi and Puccini, Mozart and Massenet in a short time has been mainly pleasant—sometimes, as with "Katya Kabanova" or "Le Nozze di Figaro," exhilarating—but there is also something about the form, with all its doomed lovers, tubercular heaving, sitcom double takes, and sugary acting, that can be enjoyed so frequently only by the resolute buff. Not for nothing does James Levine keep on his office table a blowup of a quotation from a J. B. Priestley essay: "There was a time when I heard eleven operas in a fortnight, an astonishing bit of debauchery this, which left me bankrupt and half-idiotic for a month."

This season, the main critics in town, among them Anthony Tommasini, of the *Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal's* Heidi Waleson, have been far more disenchanted than Priestley. Notices for "Katya Kabanova," "Werther," and a few others have been fine, but the critics have been especially blistering about a pair of new productions. Every decade or two, the Met overhauls the standards, the Verdi, Puccini, Donizetti, and Rossini warhorses that fill the seats. This year, the Met premièred a new "Traviata" and a new "Lucia di Lammermoor"; so outraged was the critical reaction to both that one might have thought Joseph Volpe had bankrolled twin acts of nuclear terrorism.

Tommasini wrote that the new "Lucia," which opened in December, was "simply bad, appallingly bad, a jumble of clunky, pointlessly ornate sets and unbecoming costumes, dimly lighted and further blurred by annoying scrims." The cast, he went on to say, sang with "barely concealed panic."

Two weeks earlier, an old Franco Zeffirelli production of "Traviata" had been replaced by a *new* Franco Zeffirelli production. Opera buffs around the house recalled with admiration Zeffirelli productions of the past, including a legendary "Traviata" for Maria Callas in 1958 at the Dallas Opera, but they were in a more severe mood now.

Manuela Hoelterhoff, the author of a biography of Cecilia Bartoli, told me that the new production reminded her of an explosion in a home-furnishings emporium. (Opulent furniture seemed to be a primary critical theme. The chief *Times* critic, Bernard Holland, in an otherwise devastating article, allowed as how there were some couches in Act I on Zeffirelli's set that looked especially inviting.) "Volpe's been at the Met for thirty-odd years," Hoelterhoff said, "and he remembers Franco as the great Franco. Volpe was hammering at the sets when 'Antony and Cleopatra' opened in 1966. So they go back a long way."

Originally, Volpe had got the notoriously temperamental and self-absorbed "love couple" Roberto Alagna and Angela Gheorghiu to sing Alfredo and Violetta in "Traviata," but he threw them out of the production when Alagna delayed signing a final agreement because he hated Zeffirelli's sketches and wanted his brother to design the production. Not even Alagna's agent, Herbert Breslin, could bring himself to blame Volpe for acting so decisively. "Look, Roberto is on a trip all his own," Breslin told me. "Joe's position was that the Met has a reputation and he has to keep to his word. I warned Roberto. I said, 'What's the point? Why bow out of "Traviata"? What good will it do you?' But artists are strange cats. They don't consider the consequences. They just do it."

Volpe then turned to Renée Fleming to sing Violetta. Fleming is an extraordinary singer, whose performance in this year's "Figaro" struck some critics as one of the best Countesses in modern history. Violetta, however, is an even more complicated role, and to try it for the first time at the Met is like an actor's taking on "Hamlet" for the first time at the National Theatre. The Countess is a lyric-soprano role; Violetta demands coloratura, dramatic and lyric singing—a killer, vocally and dramatically. Also, the history of Violettas at the Met includes nearly all its great soprano legends: Joan Sutherland, Amelita Galli-Curci, Licia Albanese. After practically begging Volpe and Levine for the role, Fleming, who was also suffering through the collapse of her marriage, bowed out. "When I realized I couldn't manage it, it was devastating to me to have to call Joe and tell him," Fleming told me. "I was terrified he'd say, 'Look, we moved mountains, you're on, you have to do it.' But no. He said he loved me and that he expected me for 2003."

Finally, Volpe turned to Patricia Racette, a young specialist in contemporary American opera, who had sung the role in some lesser houses and was scheduled to be the Met's second-string Violetta.

Volpe had a lot riding on "Traviata." If a production is a popular success—like Zeffirelli's "La Bohème," which premièred in 1981—the Met will keep using it for twenty-five years. If the Met is to do anything adventurous at all—this year's production of Schoenberg's "Moses und Aron," say, or next year's première of John Harbison's "The Great Gatsby"—it must fill the entire theatre, or close to it, with performances of the standard repertory. With nearly four thousand tickets to sell (at prices ranging from a hundred and sixty dollars, in the orchestra, to twenty-five dollars, in the family circle), the Met cannot be anywhere near as experimental as the Houston or the Chicago operas, to say nothing of the general-purpose Brooklyn Academy of Music and the state-subsidized theatres of France and Germany. Scoring with a successful new "Traviata," with its initial two-and-a-half-million-dollar production cost, is like buying Intel stock at fourteen dollars a share; a bomb means having to start all over again.

"People want to go for the golden oldies," Hoelterhoff said. "But what's shocking is that the traditional productions are neither elegant nor sumptuous. . . . Who's minding the store? It might be traditional opera, but it's not intelligent traditional." Many of the critics and buffs I talked to have been wondering the same thing. The rap is that Levine, while brilliant with his orchestra, doesn't adequately control the productions, and that Volpe, capable though he is as an administrator, doesn't have the artistic authority to put the brakes on the likes of Zeffirelli.

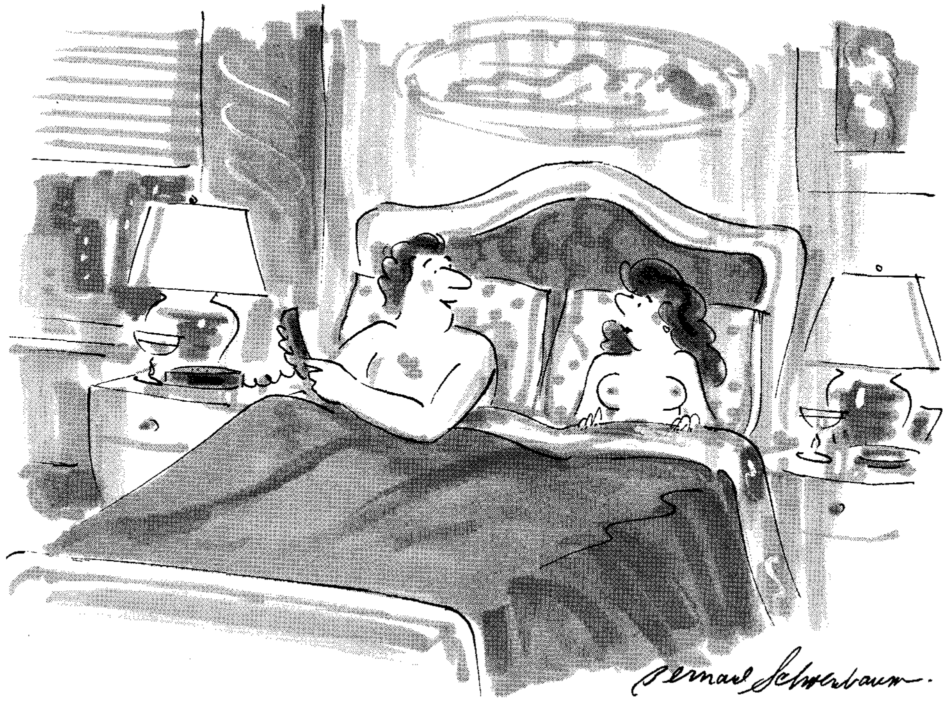
Is there an artistic vacuum at the Met? Does Levine's focus on his orchestra and Volpe's lack of artistic vision leave the house as less than it should be? Does the coöperative control of production and staging lack clear direction? In the aisles and on the Internet, those are the questions. Opera, like baseball, depends enormously on talk and opinion, even on sheer bitchy gossip, to heighten its sense of occasion, and so the village explainers, the critics, matter. The people at the Met, however, insist that they do not.

"We opened 'Traviata,' and I read in the paper that the production stinks," James Levine said. "But the audience applauds. It's not right for Tony Tommasini to write in the *Times* that it's an unsuccessful production. It's *critically* unsuccessful. In 1981, we opened 'La Bohème' and got panned and we're still doing that production, and I can tell you that the third act of that 'Bohème' is a perfect realization, a classic acoustically, and evocative.

"A lot of people say that everything happens slow and late at the Met," Levine went on. "I remember seeing a fantastic new production of 'Lulu' in Paris, and people came up to me and asked if I was jealous that we didn't have it. I

TABLE-HOPPING

On March 31st, Ruth Reichl (flanked here by two of her discoveries, Ping Hui, of Ping's, in Queens, and Rocco DiSpirito, of the Flatiron District's Union Pacific) leaves her beat as the Times restaurant critic, a post that required twelve wigs, a variety of notable pairs of glasses ("The rhinestone-studded ones go very well with the platinum blond"), and a large supply of theatrical makeup. But Reichl, who considers such hard-won anonymity essential to the critic's role as the "people's spy," began picking up clues that chefs were onto her: "Isn't there more caviar on my plate?" It was time to move on. Times readers, who will miss her willingness to avenge the slights inflicted on the average diner, can take comfort in the recent announcement that, starting in May, Reichl will exercise her discriminating judgment as the editor of Gourmet. "Now I can take the napkins off my head," she says.



"Mind if I take a moment to check with my sex therapist?"

said, 'No, because now I can learn from it and go back and do it better.' You see, the socioartistic competition does not interest me. All that interests me is the experience you have here."

"This isn't Broadway," Sarah Billinghurst said. "The critics don't matter. They hurt our feelings and they hurt the feelings of the singers—I've had singers who declare they are going home, they're so upset—but the critics make little difference to our ticket sales. . . . Look, we are here to stretch people's minds and all that, but we're also here to entertain people, aren't we?"

There are three rows of chairs in the first-tier boxes, and Volpe and his wife always sit in the rear. Their guests get seats close to the rail. As we sat down, Volpe said it was true that "Lucia" had some serious staging problems, but he insisted that he really liked this "Traviata." He insisted more than once. As the opera began—and the girl-with-a-past quickly fell in love with the boy without much of one—Volpe grew annoyed at all the muffled whispers in the box to our right.

"Go ahead," he said angrily, if not quite loud enough for the offenders to hear. "Keep talking." He sounded like Clint Eastwood: Go ahead. Make my day.

Then Volpe leaned forward and whispered edgily in my ear, "The people in those two boxes are the worst. They're single-ticket buyers and they get a drink or two in them in the restaurant and they think they own the place."

Meanwhile, onstage Patricia Racette bravely negotiated Zeffirelli's Parisian parlor, a room, it was true, with more pillows and drapes than ABC Carpet's window. The audience was applauding, if only modestly. Volpe told me that sometimes when he hears booing in the house he dispatches a factotum to find out where it's coming from. No need for that tonight.

After the second act, Volpe speedwalked down a back hallway to the offstage wings, and there he encountered the technical director, Joe Clark, who was trying to coördinate set wagons, curtains, furniture, various bewigged extras, a bullfighter, and two women dressed as cows (with pillows stuffed in their leotards for that extra-big-butted cow look).

"Well, Joe," Volpe said as he glanced at the cows. "Another subtle Franco Zeffirelli production, huh?"

Clark smiled and nodded. Then he started preparing the third-act extravaganza, in which a sickroom must rise, as if to Heaven, on a stage elevator.

Volpe, for his part, posed for a photographer with the cows.

Because Volpe's grandparents were Sicilian and Neapolitan, he has a sentimental attachment to Gatti-Casazza, the first great Met baron, but Bing is his link to the grandeur of the modern house and to the job of general manager. One afternoon, in his office, Volpe talked about Bing as the "emperor" of the Met, and one could safely assume that Volpe would like the moniker for himself. "I think his sense of humor was one which was very quick, but I think probably at other people's expense," Volpe said. "I'm accused of that sometimes. I don't think he could laugh at himself, which I can. But he was a very majestic kind of person. You picture him walking to the Met with his bowler and his umbrella. That was Rudolph Bing."

When Bing died, in 1997, one of the most prominent anecdotes in his obituaries had to do with his relationship with the great diva Maria Callas. Bing brought Callas to the house in 1956, though she was not at her best there. In the fall of 1958, Callas signed a letter of intent to sing Verdi's "Macbeth" for the Met's seventy-fifth season. According to Martin Mayer's history of the Met, Callas was to get two thousand dollars for each performance, though she was getting at least double that elsewhere. Callas and her husband-manager, Giovanni Battista Meneghini, wanted to get out of the "Macbeth" performances. Bing would not fold, and ended up firing the most charismatic singer in the history of modern opera. He then issued a blistering press release, which read, "Let us all be grateful that we had the experience of her artistry for two seasons; for reasons, however, which the musical press and public can well understand, the Met is nevertheless grateful that the association is ended."

In general, Bing's image is more refined than the reality. In an extraordinary critique, Martin Mayer, who collaborated with Bing on his memoirs, writes in his Met history that Bing, for all his achievements, was often more snob than connoisseur. "Bing had no university training—indeed, no academic or scholarly background of any kind," Mayer writes. "In those early years at the Met, he relied heavily for musical opinion on Max Rudolf, and for general culture on his old friend John Gutman, formerly a music critic in Berlin, who left a commercial job in New York to become his assistant and intellectual conscience, preparing each year lists of books Bing should—but did not—read on his summer vacation."

Volpe does not pretend either to musical expertise or to a lack of ambition. And yet he told me that nearly from the beginning of his career at the Met he had felt that he could run the place. He had also been convinced that in a frenetic atmosphere of wills run amok, a display of discipline, like Bing's, would bring the house to order. And so, like Bing, Volpe fired a willful soprano because he refused to subordinate the interests of the Met to the interests of the soprano.

A FORMER schoolteacher from Ohio, Kathleen Battle had quickly won an enormous following with her silvery, if limited, soubrette, singing such roles as Sophie in "Der Rosenkavalier" and Rosina in "The Barber of Seville"; just as quickly, she won a reputation among her colleagues as the most prima of prima donnas. She berated a tenor for looking at her while she sang. She showed up late (if at all) for rehearsals and left early. She threw tantrums about costumes and dressing rooms and cars. She humiliated conductors for their tempi, demanding that they slow down, the better to show off her pyrotechnics. From the back seat of a limousine she once called her agent long-distance, demanding that he, in turn, call the driver and ask him to lower the air-conditioning. Finally, in rehearsals for a performance of "La Fille du Régiment" at the Met, Battle nagged a fellow-singer for her allegedly poor piano technique. Volpe even began to hear that Battle was angry because there was a one-hour lunch break.

"I mean, I'm not a psychiatrist—I'll be getting my degree pretty soon, but I'm not there yet," Volpe said. "But I figured it out: she can't take an hour break. She doesn't want an hour break. Why? Everybody goes in the cafeteria, and they're shooting the breeze and having a good time. What's she going to do? Go sit in the dressing room by herself? An hour break means nothing to her. She doesn't talk to anybody. So we reorganized the schedule. Guess what? The next day, she doesn't show up. Comes in late. She's stuck in the tunnel. Then she can't do this, can't do that. So, finally, the tenor came and said to me, 'You've got to do something.' So I go down. She's already gone. It's going to go to the stage, and she doesn't stay for the rehearsal. She's gone. So I said, 'Well, I obviously have to do something.' "

James Levine, who had treated Battle with exquisite deference, tried to talk Volpe out of making any rash moves. Musically, the Met is surely in the "Levine era," but Levine only gingerly makes administrative demands of Volpe.

"Joe, if it was my decision to make," he told Volpe, "I wouldn't make this decision. I'd let her do her performances and never hire her again. But clearly it's not my decision to make. It's yours."

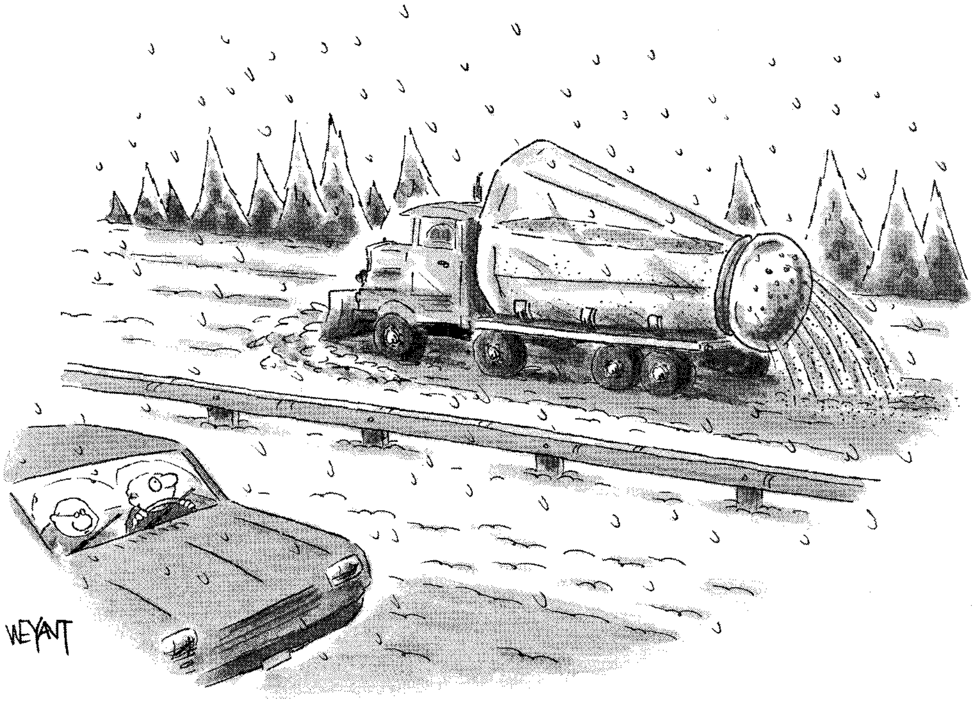
Plácido Domingo, who runs the Washington Opera when he is not singing, told me that in such cases the general manager is all alone: "The discipline of a home, an opera house, is very important. And a decision to fire someone—well, it is like a President with his hand over the button to send the missiles. Can you do it?"

Volpe told me, "My feeling was that if I let this go, there wouldn't be anybody in the company who would respect the management, would respect me. So I felt that it was something—a decision I had to make. So I made it."

Two days after he fired Battle, Volpe met with Ronald Wilford, Battle's representative at the time. According to the New York *Observer*, Wilford pointed out that Bing would forever be known for firing Callas. Did Volpe want to be known for firing Battle?

Volpe was unfazed. "More people will come to my funeral," he replied.

THAT was five years ago. Battle has not sung at the Met, or with any major opera company, since. Her voice, which had begun to fade by the time Volpe fired her, is no stronger. Volpe says that he tried to reach her not long ago, but Battle never took the call. (Nor



did she take mine; Battle has consistently refused interviews.)

"A couple of years ago, I said something to her manager about her, but she could never face coming back," Volpe said. "I don't think she'd ever accept that. She does need help."

"Would you pick up that phone and call her and ask her to come back?" I asked him.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't believe today that she would fit into the Met. I just don't believe today that anything's changed where it would be any different. And it wouldn't work for her."

"So she's barred for life?"

"Levine and I had a long talk about it at his twenty-fifth anniversary"—in 1996. "And I said, 'Jimmy, I prefer not. However, listen: If it's that important, if she'll come and do whatever she's going to do and not make a big to-do out of it, it's surely worth consideration.' "

"So the door's open?" I said.

"The door is open to anyone if they're willing to . . . if they want to come."

"That's not the door is open."

"Would I call her and say, 'I've got a great role for you to sing now'? Because what would she sing? The time has passed, unfortunately."

"Has the time passed for her voice?"

"I think the time has passed for her as a performer here."

In fact, almost no one at the Met or in the opera community around the world argues with Volpe's toughness where Battle is concerned. What some do wonder is why Volpe is so soft on the overdecorous, late Zeffirelli productions or so indulgent of a diva such as Cecilia Bartoli, who nearly ruined an otherwise brilliant production of "Figaro" this season.

Bartoli, like Battle, is a specialty singer with real star power. And so when she asked if she could sing two alternative arias as Susanna in "Figaro," Levine and Volpe readily agreed.

The story of the arias is one of rueful capitulation to a star. For the opening in 1786, the English soprano Nancy Storace premièred as Susanna, but in 1789, for a revival in Vienna, the new Susanna, Adriana Ferrarese del Bene, wanted something different, a vehicle to highlight her coloratura skills. Reluctantly, Mozart composed two arias, one in Act II and one in Act IV. The most egregious is in Act IV, when the amazing "Deh, vieni, non tardar" aria, one of the greatest in the art, is replaced by "Al desio," an out-of-place rondo that may have been perfect for Bartoli but was rather like substituting a Jeff Koons for a van Eyck. As it happened, Bartoli stepped forward to sing "Al desio" the way Eric Clapton would step out for a guitar solo; suddenly, star power overwhelmed dramatic sense and Mozart.

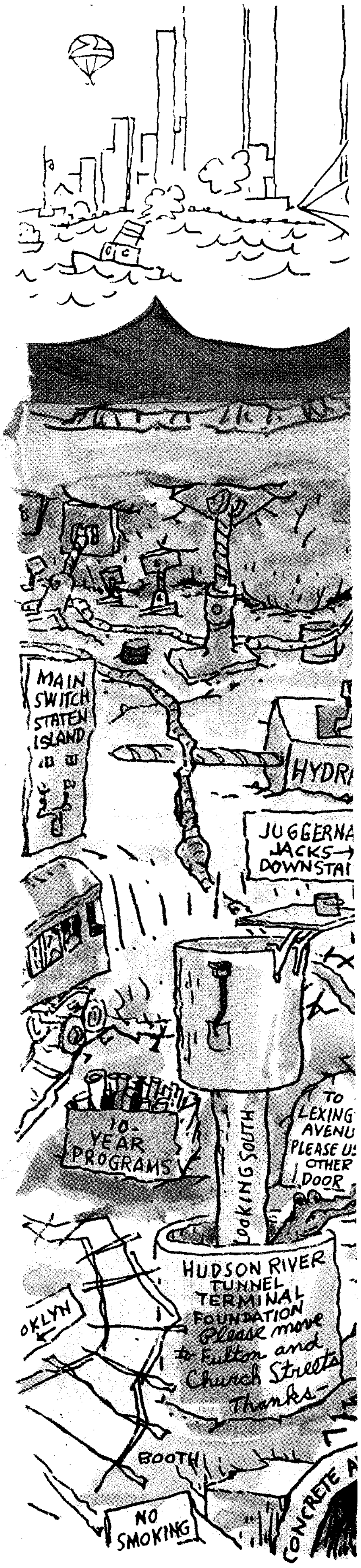
The director, Jonathan Miller, was so furious that he barely spoke to Bartoli and nearly refused to go on; instead, he went around town venting his rage at Bartoli for singing the arias and at Volpe for agreeing to the arrangement. Renée Fleming, who sang alongside Bartoli, worried that the conflict would mar the production.

"In the end, I loved it," Fleming told me later, and in a more generous mood. "And because Cecilia is a special artist and we've heard this opera a gazillion times, it was interesting. Though one alternate aria might have been enough."

Bartoli, for her part, denied that she was showing off. "It's Mozart, and people need to know," she said, by phone, from her apartment in Rome. "If we only do the 1786 version, no one will ever know the beauty of the second version. The hall was sold out, and they loved it. The only problem was Jonathan Miller. I wasn't happy then, but in the end I think the whole controversy attracted attention to the music. We did the right thing by Mozart."

Opera buffs in New York and on the Internet are still chattering about the Great Alternate Aria Scandal. When I asked Volpe about it, he just laughed. "Big deal!" he said. "Big deal!"

That was Volpe, and the Met, in Barnum mode, in box-office mode. But then, on February 8th, the house transcended mere crowd-pleasing and the bottom line: with Levine in the orchestra pit, the Met unveiled one of the most difficult and electrifying operas of the modern era—Schoenberg's "Moses und Aron." There was nothing worthy or medicinal about it; the music was exquisite, the production full of theatrical daring. No audience would think to applaud the curtains or the couches, even if there were any. ♦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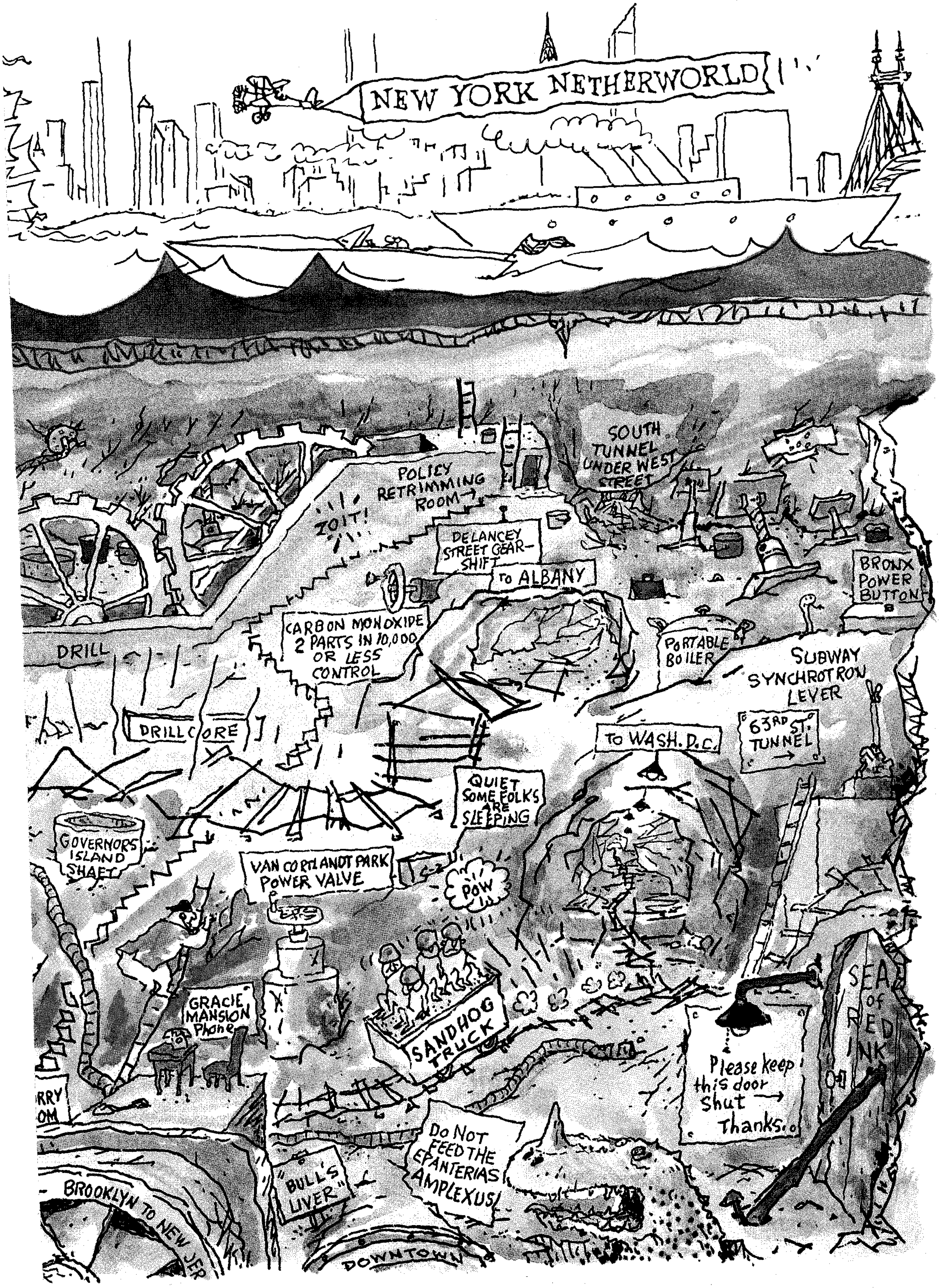
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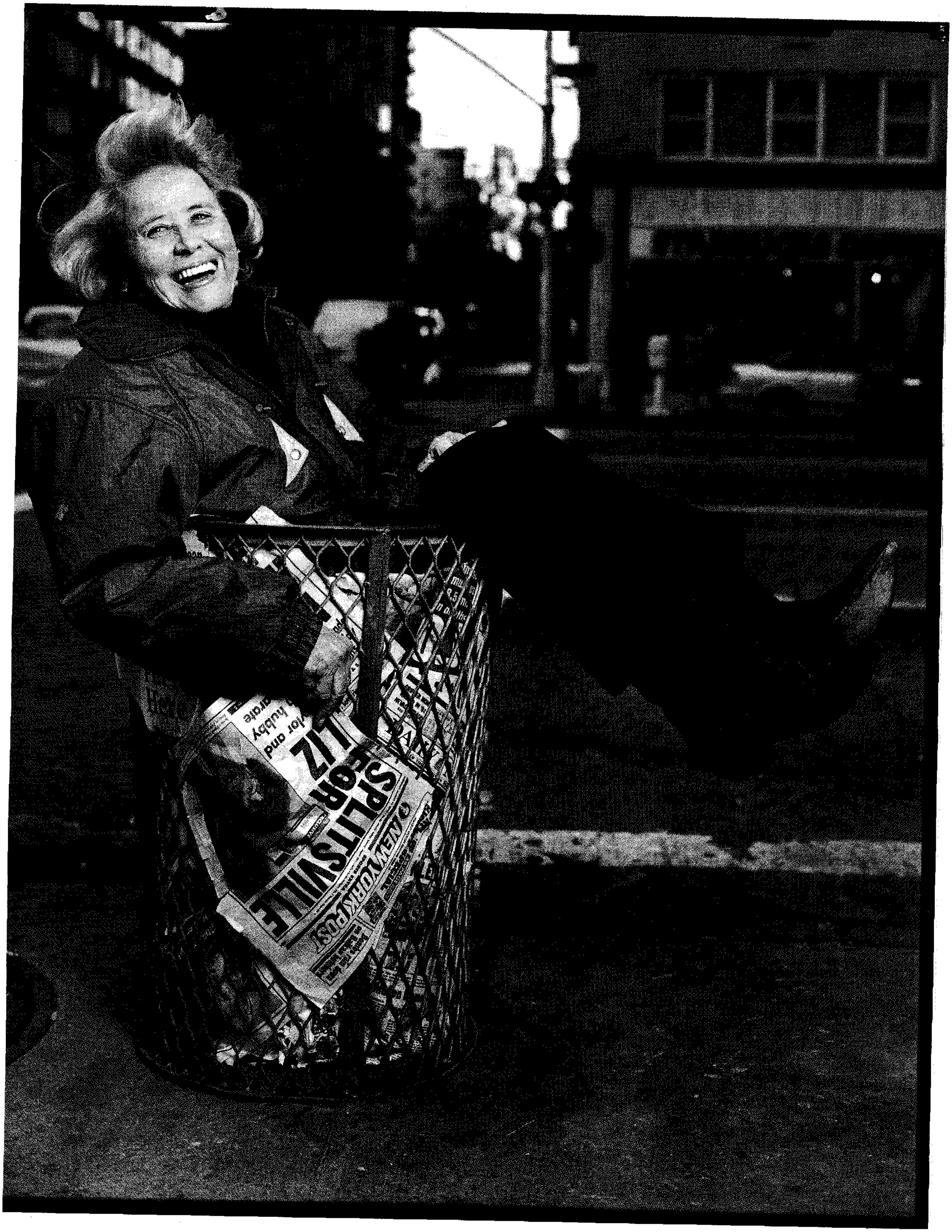

NEW YORK POST
SPLITSVILLE FOR LIZ

THE WAYWARD PRESS

TOPLESS TABLOIDS OF GOTHAM

Latest on Post v. News slay fest!

BY HENDRIK HERTZBERG

NORA (Myrna Loy): I read where you were shot five times in the tabloids.

NICK (William Powell): It's not true. He didn't come anywhere near my tabloids.

—"*The Thin Man*" (*1934*)

Aside from certain subatomic particles and unrefrigerated egg-salad sandwiches, few physical objects are more ephemeral than a tabloid newspaper. A tabloid is not a newspaper of record: the past is too far behind to worry about, the future too far ahead. Yesterday matters only insofar as it supplies copy. The day before yesterday is history—i.e., bunk. Tomorrow never comes, because by the time it does it's today. Today is the day that counts, because today's paper, and only today's paper, is on the newsstands. And today's paper, for our purposes, means today's tabloids—the New York *Daily News* and the New York *Post.* They're fighting it out, today and every day, for the hearts and minds of readers—the kind of readers who like to read fast or have to read slow. Their war may be fought in an eternal present, but it has been going on for a long time, on a battlefield soaked with the ink of newspapers living and dead. The casualties have been heavy. The combatants carry old scars and new wounds.

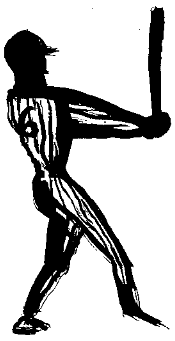
Let's define our term. The word "tabloid" originated in 1884, when a British pharmaceutical firm registered it as a trademark for a medicinal powder that had been compressed into tablet form. It's a word that has seen a lot of service lately, having become a catchall for a whole range of related developments, mostly in the "media"—the ubiquity of trashy "reality" television, the crumbling of barriers between news and entertainment, the obsession with celebrity—but also in society at large. According to *Vanity Fair,* the nineteen-nineties is "the Tabloid Decade"—that is, the decade during which we have been told more about Marv Albert, Pamela Anderson, John Wayne Bobbitt, Joey Buttafuoco, Hugh Grant, Tonya Harding, Pee-wee Herman, O. J. Simpson, and, of course, Bill Clinton and his big-haired supporting cast than, strictly speaking, we needed to know. So there is tabloidism in the sense of a general coarsening of public life. There is tabloid television, as exemplified by programs like "Hard Copy" and "The Jerry Springer Show," which are "tabloids" only metaphorically, the way "20/20" and "60 Minutes" are "magazines." And there are supermarket weeklies, like the *National Enquirer*—printed equivalents of the salt-rich offerings in the snack-food aisle. These phenomena are all very well (or all very ill), and they are descended etymologically from tabloids. But a real tabloid is something quite different.

A real tabloid is a daily newspaper. Its

Liz Smith, syndicated columnist, First Avenue and Seventy-fifth Street, January 11, 1999.

pages are "tabloid size"—that is, half the size of the pages of a "broadsheet," like the *Times* or the *Wall Street Journal.* But not every tabloid-size newspaper is a tabloid newspaper, as a glance at the *Christian Science Monitor* will confirm. A real tabloid is a specific thing, with specific qualities. The front page looks like the top half of an eye chart. It's dominated by a single huge headline in block type, plus some smaller headlines ("reefers," because they refer to stories inside the paper) and a photograph or two (the more dramatic the better). The back page is a front page, too, but about sports. Inside is a version of what appears in other daily newspapers, but with bigger headlines, shorter paragraphs, tough-guy columnists, and heavy emphasis on sensation, sports, and entertainment. The writing, at its best, is as direct and riveting as a ransom note.

The tabloid newspaper is an artifact of early- and mid-twentieth-century urbanism. Sixty years ago, three dozen American cities had one or two or even three of them. Apart from the Philadelphia *Daily News* and the Boston *Herald*, the tabloid of the classical type is dead—except in New York, the last city in the land where the newsstands are crowded with newsprint. More than thirty dailies are published here, including trade and foreign-language papers. And only in New York have not one but two heavyweight tabloids stayed on their feet, wobbly but still game, to duke it out for the entertainment of the crowd. The *Daily News* has gone a little soft around the middle, and its footwork may have grown sluggish and its speech slurred, but it has stolid, sullen strength, and it still has the weight advantage. The *Post* has dazzling moves and not an ounce of fat, and it knows how to taunt an opponent, but its mouth is bigger than its fists, and some question whether it can go the distance. Neither was born yesterday. They've both been in training for this bout for a long time.



In 1918, an artillery officer in the United States Army, Captain Joseph Medill Patterson, of Chicago, had a long talk in London with Lord Northcliffe, a Fleet Street press baron who was already well on his way to becoming the model for Lord Zinc in Evelyn Waugh's "Scoop." Northcliffe had started the world's first real tabloid, the London *Daily Mirror*, in 1903. (It's still going strong, though Rupert Murdoch's much younger addition to the British genre, the *Sun*, is going a lot stronger.) Patterson, then in his late thirties, was the co-boss—with his cousin, contemporary, and comrade in arms Robert R. McCormick—of their family's newspaper, the Chicago *Tribune*. Captain Patterson and Colonel McCormick (they would be known by their titles of military rank for the rest of their lives) got along well enough, but it had been apparent for some time that the *Tribune* wasn't big enough for both of them. For one thing, their politics were incompatible. McCormick was a conservative, to say the least, and Patterson had been a prominent radical. (He had written popular "proletarian" novels and plays, and in 1908 campaigned for Eugene V. Debs, the Socialist Presidential candidate.) Patterson's 1918 visit with Lord Northcliffe crystallized an idea he had already been mulling over—that once the war was concluded he would see if he couldn't start a tabloid of his own, in New York, and match Northcliffe's success.

With seed money borrowed from the *Tribune*, an editorial staff of about two dozen, and spare floor space and off-hours press time rented from the New York *Evening Mail*, the maiden issue of Captain Patterson's folly hit the streets on Thursday, June 26, 1919. It was pretty bad. Its name—the *Illustrated Daily News*—made it sound like a genteel rotogravure; its headline type was delicate; its photographs were framed by fancy filigrees. But the paper got better fast. Within a year, the "Illustrated" had been dropped from the title, lending it a virile, almost Biblical simplicity: give us this day our *Daily News*. A line cut of a camera—a Speed Graphic—was put between the words *Daily* and *News*, and a slogan was added underneath: NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER. Around the pictures themselves, no more curlicues: instead, thin rules that made them look sharp and crisp. A new headline display type was black and postery. Inside, the stories were short and punchy, and there were plenty of homely, wholesome features for the working-class families who were the *News's* target readers: "Bright Sayings of Children"; "The Most Embarrassing Moment of My Life"; "The Inquiring Photographer," who every day asked half a dozen men and women in the street for their opinions about something; "Today's Riddle"; a fiction serial; and comic strips, like "Gasoline Alley" and "Harold Teen," that were salted throughout the paper instead of being grouped together on one page.

By the end of 1923, the *News* was selling over seven hundred thousand copies a day—more than any other New York paper, including William Randolph Hearst's *Journal.* The following year, Hearst started his own New York tabloid, unoriginally called the *Daily Mirror*, and Bernarr Macfadden, an eccentric bodybuilder and natural-health cultist who had made a fortune with *True Story* and other popular magazines, launched the *Evening Graphic.* The *Graphic* was a real pioneer of tabloidism, as distinct from the tabloid newspaper as such. It contained scarcely any news at all, with the exception of stories elaborating, often quite imaginatively, on events in the fields of crime, sex, celebrities, and entertainment. It captured—and helped create—the spirit of what became known as the Roaring Twenties. Its "Lonely Hearts" page inspired Nathanael West; its Broadway-gossip pages were conducted by an ex-hoofer named Walter Winchell; its exuberant lack of scruple made it the journalistic equivalent of bathtub gin. The *Graphic's* most successful story is generally reckoned to have been the saga of Daddy and Peaches Browning. Edward Browning, a publicity-hungry real-estate magnate and aging playboy, married a pretty, chubby-cheeked fifteen-year-old shopgirl named Frances (Peaches) Heenan. Their romance was fodder for all three tabloids, but the *Graphic* was able to trump, so to speak, its rivals: only the *Graphic* was able to publish pictures of Daddy and Peaches in bed together, because only the *Graphic* had "composographs"—photographs in which the faces of real people were superimposed on scenes using models.

The *News* fought back with dramatic human-interest stories ranging from Lindbergh's transatlantic flight and Ruth's sixty homers to Valentino's riotous funeral. When Ruth Snyder, who with her lover had bludgeoned her

"Tell me again—which blond actress is she the blond-actress daughter of?"

husband to death, became the first woman to go to the electric chair—at Sing Sing, in 1928—the *News* sneaked in a witness with a small camera strapped to his ankle. As the switch was thrown, the *News* man pulled up his trouser cuff and, using a cable release threaded through a hole in his pocket, opened the shutter and closed it an instant later. The resulting picture was a little blurry—it looked like a German Expressionist painting—but on the front page, under a black, one-word headline (DEAD!), it was, unlike a composograph, disturbingly real.

The tabloid wars of the twenties ended in victory for the *News*. The *Graphic*, anathema to advertisers and out of synch with the sombre public mood brought on by the Depression, folded in 1932. The *Mirror* managed to limp on until the devastating newspaper strike of 1962-63. But the *News* went from strength to strength, gaining a hundred thousand readers a year. In 1944, its circulation passed the two-million mark.

Captain Patterson paid close attention to every aspect of the *News*. He selected and often suggested story lines for its comic strips, and they came to include such icons of mid-century popular culture as "Little Orphan Annie," "Dick Tracy," and "Brenda Starr, Reporter." He supervised the construction of the News Building—a fine Art Deco skyscraper, opened in 1930, on Forty-second Street between Second and Third Avenues. He hired and fired editors, reporters, and columnists, and made sure that they (and all his other employees) were decently paid. (He also made sure that they didn't get too famous: in Patterson's universe, the paper was the star. In the *Mirror*, by contrast, columnists—particularly Winchell, who joined up when the *Graphic* began to fade—were kings.) Above all, Patterson decided what opinions were expressed in the *News's* plainspoken, conversational editorials.

In the nineteen-thirties, those editorials backed the New Deal with gusto. The *News* even led the fund drive to install the White House swimming pool that allowed Franklin D. Roosevelt to exercise despite his crippled legs. But, as the decade drew to a close, the President's foreign policy began to alarm Patterson, who was a passionate isolationist and Anglophobe. When Roosevelt announced his plan to send supplies to Britain, Patterson turned on him, and the *News* denounced lend-lease as "a bill to make the President dictator of the United States." It did not help matters that four days after Pearl Harbor, when the Captain visited the Commander-in-Chief to offer his services in the war, F.D.R. humiliated him by giving him a sarcastic assignment: to reread his editorials from the previous year.

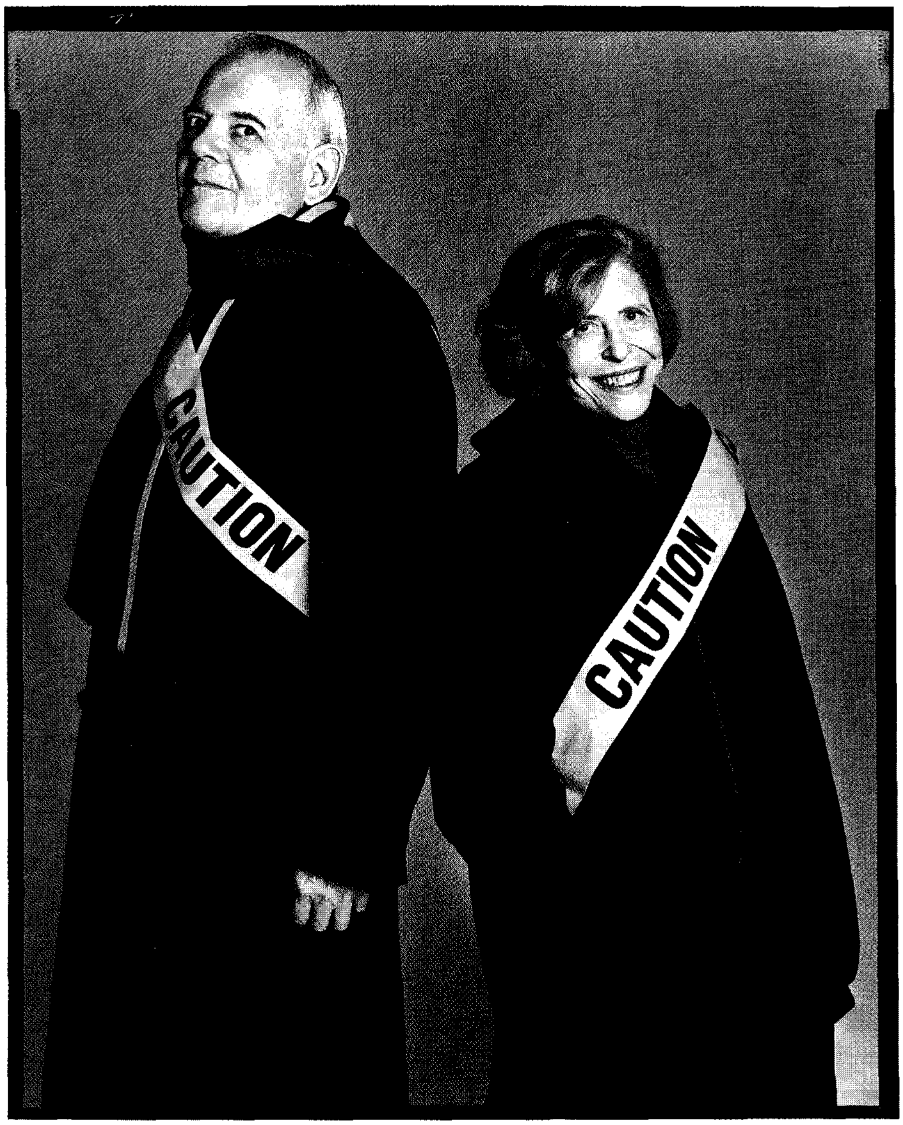
By the time Patterson died, in May of 1946, the *News's* political line had become as reactionary as that of its parent, the Chicago *Tribune*, to which control of the *News* now reverted. When the Republicans won control of Congress that fall, the *News's* Washington columnist, John O'Donnell, proclaimed that "the Commies" had been defeated, and sneered, "Franklin Roosevelt died too soon. A kindly fate plucked him from the world stage before the angry audience of his fellow-countrymen had a chance to boo and yell their derision with all the fury of suckers who have just discovered that they've been trimmed to a fare thee well by the city slicker." The day's editorial expressed similar sentiments, adding the paper's regret "that J. M. Patterson, founder of this newspaper and its publisher for almost 27 years, did not live to see this anti-New Deal triumph."

The paper that the Captain left behind was selling two and a third million copies a day and four and a half million on Sundays: MORE THAN TWICE THE CIRCULATION OF ANY OTHER PAPER IN AMERICA, a standing box boasted. Patterson's body was barely in the ground when those figures began drifting gently downward. It's tempting to blame the founder's absence for the drop, but there were plenty of other, grander factors. Television—slayer of movies, slayer of radio, slayer of popular magazines, slayer of every form of human activity and inactivity except itself—happened. Suburbanization happened, exiling customers to places without newsstands and subways. Mass higher education (the G.I. bill) happened. Industrial jobs melted away. Costs went up, and so did the street prices of newspapers—in the case of the *News*, from two cents (1948) gradually up to fifty cents (1994). Papers were shutting down like so many vaudeville theatres. All this was tough on everybody except the *Times*, which skimmed the cream of a growing class of the educated and the aspiring. The wonder is that the *News's* circulation fell as slowly as it did. Daily sales took almost thirty years to dip below two million. Not until the nineties did the numbers settle into six figures. By then, the *News's* main enemy was no longer the *Graphic* or the *Mirror*, or even television. It was the *Post*.

THE New York *Post* has the noblest pedigree of any newspaper in America. By comparison—as far as bloodlines are concerned, at least—journalistic grandees like the *Times* are jumped-up Johnny-come-latelies. The *Post* is the only screaming tabloid (for that matter, the only surviving periodical of any kind) to have been founded by a Founding Father—and not just any Founding Father but the handsomest, dashingest, and arguably most brilliant of them all, Alexander Hamilton. In the spring of 1801, Hamilton brought together a roomful of New York's richest and most staunchly Federalist merchants at the country house of Archibald Gracie (now the official residence of New York's mayors) and persuaded them to pledge the necessary capital. "We openly profess our attachment to that system of politics denominated FEDERAL," an editorial note on page one of the first issue declared, adding:

> The design of this paper, is to diffuse among the people correct information on all interesting subjects; to inculcate just principles in religion, morals, and politics; and to cultivate a taste for sound literature.

The *Evening Post*, as it was called then, stuck to that basic credo for many decades, even as its politics shifted amid the tumult of events. It could be a little sketchy in the correct-information department—it was a four-page paper until the mid-eighteen-eighties, and there wasn't room for everything—but no one can question the justness of its principles (it backed Lincoln, denounced slavery, and advocated black enfranchisement) or the soundness of its literature (its writers included James Russell Lowell, Henry Adams, and Charles Eliot Norton). The *Evening Post* was guided by a succession of brilliant and formidable editors: the poet and essayist William Cullen ("Thanatopsis") Bryant, who held the job for fifty years; the Irish-born polemicist E. L. Godkin, who had founded *The Nation*, and who merged that political weekly, for a time, with the *Post*; and



ROBERT SILVERS AND BARBARA EPSTEIN, *co-editors of The New York Review of Books, New York City, January 13, 1999.*

Rollo Ogden, who became a legendary managing editor of the *Times*.

At the turn of the century, the *Evening Post's* circulation was only a little over twenty thousand—a pebble compared to Gibraltars like Joseph Pulitzer's *World* and Hearst's *Journal*, both of which, at various times, were selling a million copies a day. But it was the right twenty thousand, and what would today be called its readership profile attracted advertisers. (Pulitzer himself once told an interviewer that the *Evening Post* was his favorite newspaper. Asked why he didn't make the *World* more like it, he replied, "Because I want to talk to a nation, not a select committee.") "You will see few copies of the *Evening Post* in Hell's Kitchen," sniffed a handsomely printed promotional booklet in 1925. "On the commuting trains," it went on, "you see few *Evening Posts* in the smokers, but many in the club cars." After the Depression hit, though, things got dicey in the club cars. In 1933, the *Evening Post*—whose politics had by then become as stuffily conservative as its typography had always been—was sold to a Philadelphian, J. David Stern, and he jazzed it up a bit, dumbed it down a bit, dropped the "Evening" from its name, and made it a supporter of gaseous liberalism in general and F.D.R. in particular. In 1939, Stern sold it to a purportedly wealthy liberal named George Backer, or so the *Times* reported. Actually, the ownership passed to Mrs. Backer; she paid Stern nothing, but she assumed responsibility for the *Post's* debts and losses. A couple of years later, Mrs. Backer, a member of the "Our Crowd" aristocracy of German-Jewish financial dynasties, divorced George and moved into the publisher's office herself. She stayed there for thirty-five years, and created the immediate precursor of the *Post* of today.

Mrs. Backer tended to go through husbands briskly, so eventually she reverted to her maiden name, Dorothy (Dolly) Schiff. In 1942, she turned the *Post* into a tabloid. Her *Post* used big, black headlines, but it never fully embraced the slam-bang style of tabloid news coverage. Its role was different.

During the nineteen-fifties and early sixties, the morning papers were about class and the afternoon papers were about tribe. In the morning, the *Times* and the *Herald Tribune* were for the patricians, the *News* and the *Mirror* for the plebeians. In the afternoon, the *Journal-American* was for the Irish and Italian Catholics, the *World-Telegram* for the white-collar, white-bread, white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, and the *Post* for the Jews, the blacks, and (a little redundantly) the liberals. The *Post*, indeed, was the only daily voice of full-throated liberalism, not only in New York but in any big city in the land. Its columnists included Murray Kempton, Max Lerner, Eleanor Roosevelt, and James A. Wechsler, who was also the editorial-page editor. Its liberalism was firmly of the anti-Stalinist stripe, but that only made its crusades against such heroes of the right as Joseph McCarthy, J. Edgar Hoover, and (in his later, bitter years) Walter Winchell more credible. People joked that the ideal *Post* story began, "His only crime was being born a Negro."

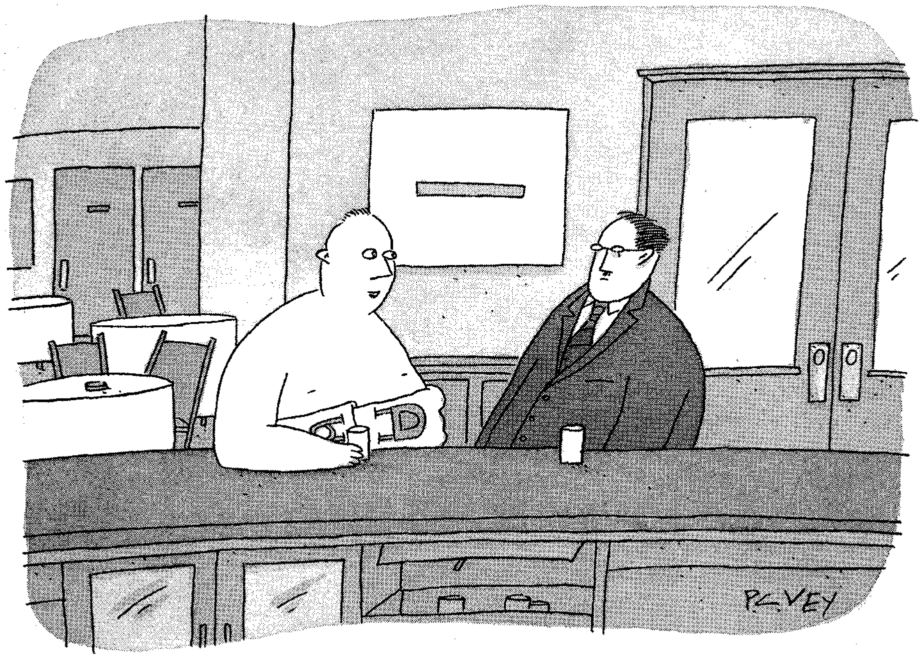
In circulation, the *Post* tended to run dead last. But by 1950 it had gradually worked its way into the black, and it achieved a goal that eluded its rivals: it survived. During the 1962-63 newspaper strike, Mrs. Schiff broke ranks with the other publishers and made a separate peace with the unions, putting the *Post* on newsstands all by itself for a month. After the strike, the *Journal-American* and the *World-Telegram* staggered on for a few years and then merged with each other and the *Herald Tribune* to form the *World Journal Tribune*, known briefly and without much affection as the Widget. This ghastly amalgam—which contained, one way or another, the bones of a dozen once great newspapers—expired like an overfed cannibal on May 5, 1967. The *Post*, now alone in the afternoon, enjoyed a decade of peace and, by its standards, something akin to prosperity. The confrontation with the *News* was about to begin.

In December, 1976, Mrs. Schiff, who by then was well into her seventies, sold the *Post* to Rupert Murdoch. Murdoch, at forty-five, was already a formidable figure in his native Australia and in Britain, where he would soon add the venerable London *Times* to a stable that included the spectacularly successful *Sun*, the mass-circulation Sunday *News of the World*, and a number of television interests. Acquiring the *Post* put him on the American map. His arrival marked the beginning of a decade and a half of turmoil in New York's tabloids, including theatrics, near-death experiences, multiple bankruptcies, last-minute rescues, and outright lunacy. As Winchell used to say: Let's go to press.

THE year: 1977. The *News*, coasting on its famous FORD TO CITY: DROP DEAD headline—which some credited with deciding the 1976 Presidential election—is smug. Within days of taking over the *Post*, Murdoch launches Page Six, a gossipy, attitudinous daily compendium of ministories about celebrities, media, and politicians; it becomes the new *Post's* signature feature. British and Australian commandos hit the beach to teach the natives the sensationalist techniques of Fleet Street tabloid journalism. The stress is on crime and race, often in inflammatory conflation. Circulation begins to climb—still only a third of the *News's*, but the bigger paper's complacency is shaken.

1980-81. The *News* fights back, launching an afternoon edition of its own, an upscale tab dubbed *Tonight*. It is an expensive disaster: aiming for sales of three hundred thousand, it barely gets into six figures, hemorrhages money, and folds in a year. The *News*, now politically centrist, endorses Carter for reëlection. The *Post*, its Schiff-era liberalism spiked, backs Reagan. A *Columbia Journalism Review* editorial slams the *Post:* "The front pages regularly play to two emotions: fear and rage. And all too often what follows is meant to turn white against black, the comfortable against the poor. . . . The New York *Post* is no longer merely a journalistic problem. It is a social problem—a force for evil." Whoa, easy there! The *Post's* losses mount—the big department stores shun it—but so do street sales, spurred by a cash-prize promotion called Wingo. The *News's* deft counterstroke: a cash-prize promotion called Zingo.

1982-83. Reeling from the *Tonight* debacle, the *News* wins cost concessions from the unions; in Chicago, the Tribune Company renews its commitment to keep it afloat. The *Post* is now a morning paper. Its typography gets ever wilder; its "wood"—the daily cover headline, so called because in the days of handset type the biggest fonts were



"I'm living proof that life begins at forty-three."

• •

carved from wood—ever more outrageous. When a gunman shoots the owner of an after-hours strip joint in Queens and forces a female patron—a mortician—to decapitate the victim, the *Post* produces a masterwork: HEADLESS BODY IN TOPLESS BAR. According to "It's Alive!," Steven Cuozzo's entertaining book about the *Post*, the auteur is Vincent A. Musetto, an assistant managing editor.

A New York edition is launched by *Newsday*, the prosperous, dignified Long Island tabloid-size paper founded in 1940 by Captain Patterson's daughter Alicia. *Post* and *News* staffers dismiss it as a tabloid in a tutu.

1987. In October, the stock-market crash poleaxes the city's economy, and the tabs feel the pain. The *News* wins more union concessions. In Washington, Senator Ted Kennedy, seeking revenge for *Post* assaults, slips a midnight rider into an appropriations bill which prevents Murdoch from getting a permanent waiver to own newspapers and TV stations in the same markets. Murdoch is forced to sell the *Post*, whose circulation is down to half a million from its Wingo-powered height of over nine hundred thousand. The buyer: Peter S. Kalikow, a tough-talking real-estate developer with no publishing experience.

1988. Kalikow turns out to be a surprisingly resourceful owner. He appoints attention-getting editors: first, Jane Amsterdam, the glamorous young founding editor of a trendy magazine called *Manhattan, inc.;* then Gerald Nachman, a fat, colorfully profane ex-TV producer. But a hubristic attempt to launch an elaborate Sunday edition is a fiasco. Losses mount at both tabloids.

1990-92. After a long, bitter strike that cripples the *News* for four months, Chicago runs out of patience. The *News* is "sold" to Robert Maxwell, pompous, portly owner of the London *Daily Mirror*. (Actually, Tribune Company executives pay Maxwell sixty million dollars to take the *News* and its obligations off their hands.) Meanwhile, Kalikow's business interests go south; he declares personal bankruptcy. Eight months after buying the *News*, Maxwell, facing margin calls from his bankers, vanishes from his yacht into the sea, a probable suicide; his fraud-riddled business empire collapses. The *News*—cashless and ownerless, its circulation dropping below eight hundred thousand—files for bankruptcy. The *Post* is in free fall: its claimed half-million circulation is revealed to be fifty thousand readers short.

1993. The climactic year: annus horribilis, annus mirabilis. Mortimer Zuckerman, Montreal-born real-estate entrepreneur and owner of the *Atlantic Monthly* and *U.S. News & World Report*, buys the *News*, rescuing it from certain death. He raids the prostrate *Post* for talent. At the *Post*, Kalikow, hounded into court by creditors, turns to a faintly shady financial operator, Steven Hoffenberg, for rescue. In a brilliant stroke, Hoffenberg hires a new editor: Pete Hamill, novelist, reporter, longtime writer of big-hearted, emotion-laden columns for every tabloid in town, romancer of Jackie Onassis and Shirley MacLaine, Brooklyn-bred man of the people at ease among the Manhattan élite, mentor to young writers—a kind of tabloid saint. Hamill rallies the troops and brings the paper instant credibility, but within a month the Hoffenberg deal unravels.

Another rescuer appears, via the bankruptcy court: Abe Hirschfeld, a publicity-seeking septuagenarian parking-lot mogul with a dialect-joke Yiddish accent and a penchant for pointless runs for public office. Hirschfeld immediately fires Hamill and a score of other editors and managers, announces plans to fire hundreds more at random, and appoints Wilbert Tatum—race-baiting publisher of the *Amsterdam News*, a once great black weekly increasingly allied with Louis Farrakhan—to be editor of the *Post*. Suddenly, the parking-lot king's eccentricities take on a sinister cast. Chaos reigns; the paper's closing is hours away.

The staff revolts. Staking everything on a grand gesture, editors and reporters take control of the newsroom and put together one of the most remarkable issues ever published by an American newspaper. The cover is a huge woodcut of Alexander Hamilton with a tear rolling down his cheek. Hamill's name is defiantly restored to the masthead as editor-in-chief. Eighteen pages—the entire "news hole," including gossip columns and editorials—are devoted to a joyful excoriation of Hirschfeld and Tatum:

WHO IS THIS NUT?

HONEST, ABE DOESN'T KNOW
SPIT ABOUT JOURNALISM

HATE-'EM TATUM READY FOR SLIME TIME

AN URGENT APPEAL TO
POST READERS: HELP!

The edition captures the city's imagination. " 'Rage, rage against the dying of the light,' Dylan Thomas advised," a *Times* editorial praising the rebels begins. Governor Mario Cuomo, a favorite target of *Post* editorials, takes over the search for a new, responsible owner. Norman Mailer speaks at a rally. Hamill returns in triumph, fist pumping, to a foot-stamping newsroom ovation. (HE'S BACK, the next day's wood thunders.) Hirschfeld throws him out, but the judge brings him back and he edits the paper from a diner down the street. It's a beautiful week—a nicotine-and-ink-stained velvet revolution. But it can't last. Within days, a real rescuer appears—one who actually has the resources and the determination to save the *Post* from the abyss. Everyone is grateful, but in some quarters the gratitude has a queasy edge. The rescuer is Rupert Murdoch.

Cut to the present.

WHERE are they now? Well, Abe Hirschfeld is back where he likes to be—in the news, first for offering Paula Jones a phantom million dollars to drop her lawsuit against President Clinton, then for being charged with hiring someone to murder a business partner of his. Peter Kalikow is doing real-estate deals. Steven Hoffenberg is in jail for defrauding investors. New York *Newsday* is dead. Mario Cuomo is back in private life, having been defeated in 1994 for a fourth term, after getting the endorsement of neither the *News*, ideology notwithstanding, nor the *Post*, gratitude notwithstanding. Jane Amsterdam is in Westchester County, participating in carriage-driving competitions. Gerald Nachman lives in California and is an occasional guest on "Politically Incorrect." Mort Zuckerman is running the *News* and running through editor after editor—five of them so far. One editor he ran through was Pete Hamill, who lasted for the first eight months of 1997. Today, Hamill writes books in his new apartment—an airy loft near Park Row, in the part of lower Manhattan that is haunted by the ghosts of scores of newspapers. Rupert Murdoch is thinking about the succession at his News Corporation, which has grown into a worldwide communications empire that includes movie studios and national and international cable- and satellite-television networks. And the *News* and the *Post* are circling each other in the ring, probing for weaknesses.

On the surface, the continuity between past and present at the *News* is much stronger than it is at the *Post*. The old *News* was a mass-circulation tabloid for working people; so is the new *News*. The new *News* looks recognizably like the old *News*. The title logo is essentially the same, with a stylized Speed Graphic still between *Daily* and *News*. (The old slogan, though, has been modified to the feebler NEW YORK'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER—a shot at the *Times*' cosmopolitanism.) Politically, the old *News* was liberal and then it was conservative, while the new *News* is a hair to the left of center; but the paper's reporting, as ever, plays it pretty straight. The *Post*, by contrast, looks about as much like its ancestor as a Tokyo skinhead looks like the Mikado. The nineteenth-century *Post* was a highbrow broadsheet; the Dorothy Schiff *Post* was a middlebrow, earnest tabloid aimed at liberals; the Murdoch *Post* is a lowbrow, mischievous tabloid aimed, apparently, at converting the teeming urban masses to pickup-truck conservatism.

Yet the *News's* greater continuity is not really a source of strength. Its past greatness hangs over it like a shadow—more a rebuke than an inspiration. And the discontinuities at the *Post* are not as severe as they appear. Through the *Post's* many incarnations, its raison d'être has been the propagation of political opinion. If it made money, so much the better, but its survival has never depended on its balance sheet. And its news pages have never played it straight.

To paraphrase that 1801 editorial, the *Post* of today openly professes its attachment to that system of politics denominated RIGHT-WING REPUBLICAN. During last fall's New York senatorial campaign, the *Post* pulled out the stops for the incumbent, Al D'Amato. Eleven editorials promoted his candidacy or bashed his Democratic challenger, Representative Charles Schumer. The actual endorsement editorial was trumpeted with gigantic page-one wood: WE SAY D'AMATO. Coverage was extravagantly slanted. A double-page spread ostensibly devoted to examining the candidates' stands on education consisted of two items: a column attacking Schumer for being allied with the teachers' union and an article headlined D'AMATO WANTS PARENTS TO HAVE CHOICE. In the closing days of the campaign, the cheerleading grew risible. AL STORMS AHEAD was the wood for the final Sunday's front page; inside, a story puffed a *Post* poll purportedly showing D'Amato with a lead of 1.3 per cent, though that lead, as the story admitted in passing, "is well within the survey's 3.8-point margin of error." (Other polls were by then showing Schumer coasting to victory.) Tuesday's *Post* had a little squib entitled "Schumer Leads in Stretch Run," but it

MENU
S. GROSS

"Is that you, Pumpkin?"

was dwarfed by MAMMA HELPS GET AL'S CAMPAIGN COOKIN', with a heartwarming picture of the Senator and his doting mother. After Schumer won, the *Post* editorialized loftily that D'Amato and the Republicans had deserved to lose, because the Party "chose to run a campaign in which it expected President Clinton's troubles and the economy's successes to grant it easy victories." A fair point, but a curious one coming from a paper that had spent the previous ten months attacking Clinton (in the news pages) as a criminal, a weasel, a pervert, a felon who belongs in jail, and a tyrant using his K.G.B.-style secret police to trash American liberties.

The *Post* is a raffish, intermittently unreliable redoubt of what has been called the counterestablishment—the network of conservative and neoconservative publications and think tanks which has been built up over the past generation in imitation of the supposedly monolithic liberal establishment. Besides the *Post*, which provides (ideologically, at least) a counter to the *Times*, Murdoch's contribution to the cause includes the *Weekly Standard*, which counters *The New Republic*, and Fox News, which counters Ted Turner's liberal-leaning CNN. All three lose money.

THE *News* and the *Post* bring distinct strengths and weaknesses to the daily battle. The *News* has size. Its editorial staff is bigger—some three hundred and fifty people, eighty-odd more than the *Post's*. Though the *News* can no longer claim to be the biggest-selling daily in the country, or even in the city (at seven hundred and twenty-three thousand, it comes in sixth nationally, after the *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, the Los Angeles *Times*, the New York *Times*, and the Washington *Post*), it still outsells the *Post* (which ranks fourteenth nationally) by three hundred thousand on weekdays and more than four hundred thousand on Sundays.

To a reader—to this reader, at least—the *News* comes across as a paper suffering from clinical depression, while the *Post* is more like a hyperactive monomaniac, alternately amusing and obnoxious. By most conventional measures, the *News* is probably the better paper. If, God forbid, you had to pick one of them as your sole source of information about the world we live in, you would certainly pick the *News*. There's simply more news in the *News*, and that news is presented in a more balanced, less distorted manner. The *News's* cityside columnists, Jim Dwyer and Juan Gonzalez, are stronger. Its TV listings are better. It has "Doonesbury." Its Washington columnist, Lars-Erik Nelson, is so smart that he moonlights for *The New York Review of Books*.

But the *Post* plays a better game of high-low. For the arugula set, it has enterprising, lively business pages, focussed cannily on media and Internet firms, and its many gossip columns—ranging from the hipness of Page Six to the sweetness of Liz Smith—are more fun. For the hamburger eaters, it has a topflight sports section. And when it comes to tabloid élan the *Post* cleans the *News's* clock with metronomic regularity.

As a scientific example—scientific because the two papers were working from exactly the same raw material—let's take a recent day's developments in the Perelman-Duff divorce case, a current tabloid staple. Ronald Perelman, the Revlon supremo, and Patricia Duff, his beautiful blond ex-wife, are embroiled in what is known as a custody battle. At a hearing, Perelman was grilled about his income, his houses, their furnishings, his vacations, his household servants, his cars, his private jets—a toy store's worth of goodies for the tabs to sift through. The *Post* found the right detail to go with. Under an overline reading "New York's Cheapest Billionaire," the front-page wood shouts, I FEED MY KID ON $3 A DAY. The accompanying paparazzi-style photograph is more than a year old, but it's skillfully chosen: it shows Perelman crossing the street and reaching for his daughter's arm, but the little girl cringes away from him, clutching the hand of someone (perhaps a nanny) outside the frame. The story, by Dareh Gregorian, is peppered with cheeky epithets for the villain of the piece—"the makeup magnate," "the powder-puff poobah"—and begins, "High-living billionaire Ron Perelman says he can feed his 4-year-old daughter on just $3 a day." It continues:

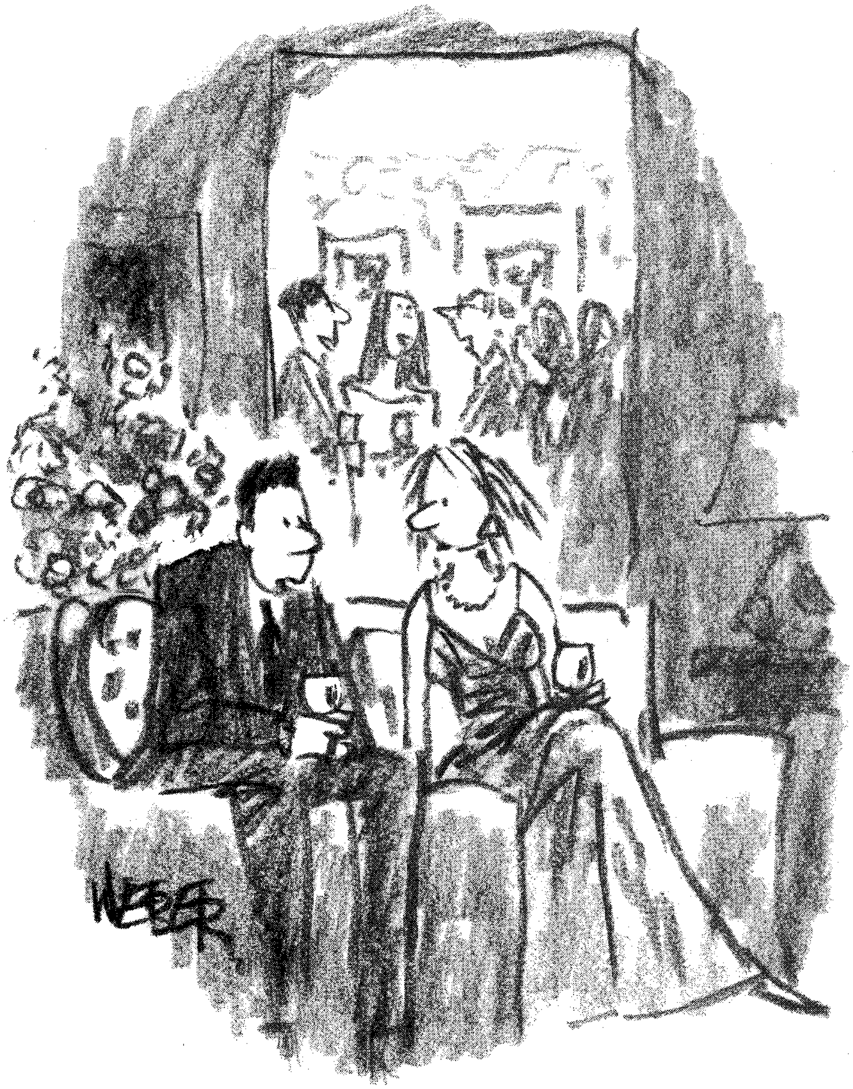
> "When Caleigh eats with me, she eats $3 worth of food a day," Perelman said. "She eats chicken fingers, hot dogs, cereal for breakfast, hamburgers and some pasta."
>
> "Three dollars? So about a $1000 a year would be appropriate?" [Duff lawyer William] Beslow asked.
>
> "Yes," Perelman replied. . . .
>
> U.S. Department of Agriculture figures show $3.07 a day was the national average last year for a "low-cost" home-cooked food plan for a 4-year-old.
>
> Perelman has a full-time chef on his staff.

Great stuff. How does the *News* handle the story? On page one, nothing. The wood is POTHOLE CITY, with a subhead reading "5,000 Craters in Last Week Wreak Havoc on Drivers." The picture—showing a couple of potholes that have been filled in—undermines the headline's alarm. Potholes are a city-desk perennial: there's a rash of them every time the roads thaw out after a freezing rain. The *News's* Perelman-Duff story, on an inside page, runs under the headline TYCOON'S LAVISH LIFE. The picture shows Perelman in an overcoat, smiling. "Billionaire Ronald Perelman yesterday reluctantly provided a rare peek into his privileged lifestyle—a world overstuffed with mansions, money and yachts," the story begins. The three-dollar food budget isn't even mentioned until the third paragraph. No numbers from the Department of Agriculture; that's a *Post* exclusive.

It's not always this one-sided, of course. The *News* has its good days, too, and its readers remain surprisingly loyal. "There's a potent link between a huge stratum of people in New York and the *Daily News*," Jim Dwyer, who moved to the *News* after New York *Newsday* folded, told me recently. "It's read by people who run diners, by doormen, by housewives in the Bronx and Queens and Brooklyn. It's on every court officer's desk and in every police precinct." The *News* dominates the outer boroughs, where most of its press run is sold. The *Post* is stronger in Manhattan, where, on newsstands, it outsells not only the *News* but the *Times* as well. The *Post* is a "second read": most of its buyers read one of the other papers, too. This is bad for advertising but good for influence. New York's media élites read the *Times* for information and the *Post* for gossip and a giggle. The people who play softball with Mort Zuckerman in the Hamptons read the *Post*. They don't generally read the *News*—a source of great frustration for the star pitcher.

People who have worked at both papers agree that staff morale is higher at the *Post* than at the *News*. At the *News*, years of fratricidal strikes, mass layoffs, editorial revolving-doorism, front-office second-guessing, and obscure lines of authority have left the staff feeling, as one of them puts it, like "abused children with no self-esteem." Every office shakeup deposits a layer of bitter sediment. At the *Post*, the editorial bureaucracy is smaller and stabler. Ken Chandler, an old and able Murdoch hand, has been its editor since shortly after the Hirschfeld uprising. And the *Post* has the whole global Murdoch empire to move people into and out of—"kind of like the way the British had India," in Pete Hamill's phrase.

At the *News*, cynicism is a shelter; at the *Post*, it's an opportunity. *Post* people have lower expectations, fewer hopes, and no pretensions, so they can get more fully into the fun of putting out a wild and crazy tabloid. If the chance comes along to do some honorable work—and it does, especially when there's no election coming—well, then, so much the better. At the *News*, people have learned to keep their heads down. Even the two papers' new offices make for a happier *Post:* the *Post's* are in Murdoch's spiffy glass box in the heart of media midtown; the *News's*, in the dreary, remote West Thirties, have high ceilings, but the effect is more warehouse than cathedral, with windows far above eye level.



"I'm making a bundle on Wall Street, but it's not what I really want. What I really want is to make a bundle uptown."

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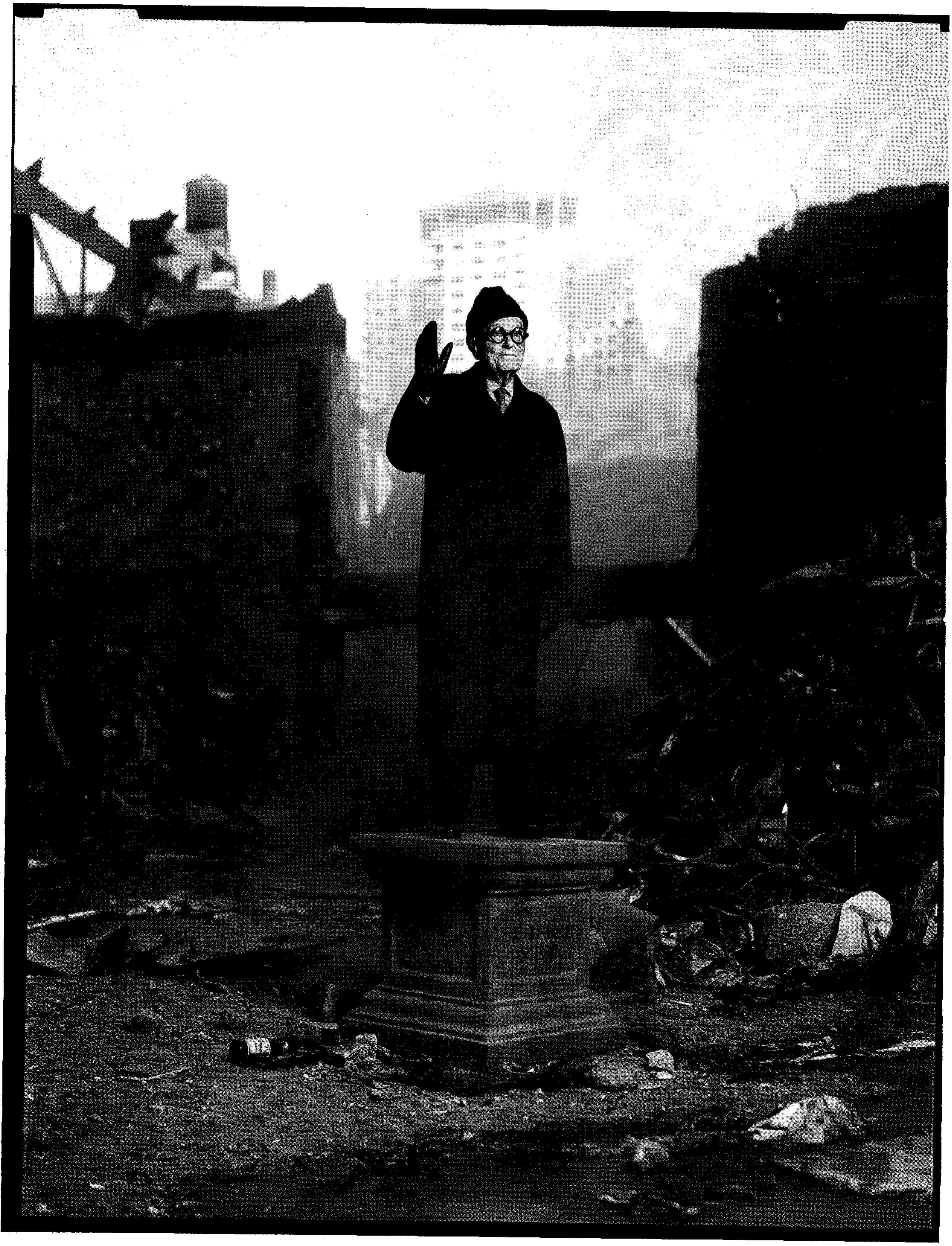
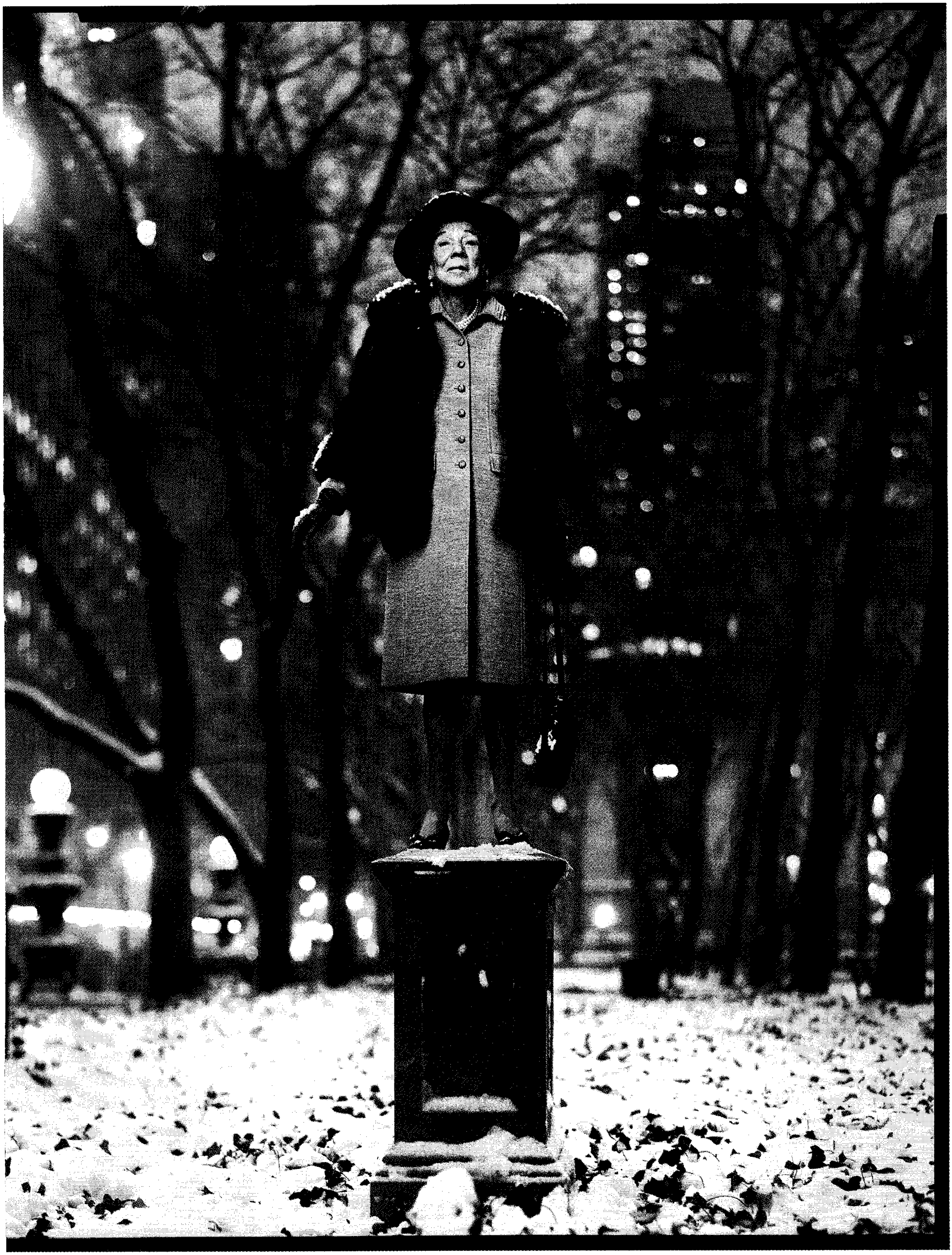
Because the *News* is privately held and the *Post* is a drop in the Murdoch ocean, estimates of both papers' financial viability are hard to come by. A reasonable guess is that the *News* makes a small operating profit and the *Post* loses somewhere between ten and thirty million dollars a year. The *Post* is therefore something unusual in the annals of down-market journalism: a vanity tabloid, supported by a rich patron as if it were the opera. Thanks to Zuckerman, the *News* is a viable business, but from the point of view of return on capital its continued existence, too, is a function of something other than its bottom line. Tabloids have become one of those subsidized cultural treasures that we New Yorkers get to enjoy simply because we live in New York.

And they are treasures. When I was a little boy, we had the *Times* delivered, but my father sometimes brought home the tabloids as a slightly naughty treat. Their look and feel excited me. By the time I was eleven or twelve, I was coming in from the suburbs to haunt the Newspaper Division of the New York Public Library, which occupied a floor of an industrial loft building not far from where the office of the *News* is now. I spent long, hypnotic afternoons in that repository of esoteric knowledge, turning the pages of fat, yellowing bound volumes not only of the *News*, the *Mirror*, and the *Post* but also of obscurer tabloids, tantalizingly vanished—the *Evening Graphic*, of course, and *PM*, and the *Compass*. Now the Newspaper Division is gone, too: it was closed in 1961, and bound volumes were simply thrown away after their contents were transferred, minus body and soul, to microfilm. But the jolt they gave me—the electric connection to a grittier, more tumultuous, jazzier world than mine, a world where people stay up late, wear snap-brim hats, and hear the sound of sirens—hasn't altogether disappeared. I still feel a tingle of it every morning when I get my hands on the newspapers. Especially the tabloids, whose todays are eternal. ♦



PHILIP JOHNSON, *architect, First Avenue between Seventy-fifth and Seventy-sixth Streets, January 18, 1999.*



BROOKE ASTOR, *philanthropist and patron of the New York Public Library, Bryant Park, January 21, 1999.*

LETTER FROM BROOKLYN

THE DOPE SHOW

The women who got lost in a forbidden city.

BY HILTON ALS

YVONNE, greasy-haired and alive, high on junk, brown-skinned, and myopic: she was the mother of one or two children, or maybe three. No one knew exactly how many she had had or had given away or been forced to give away; everyone remembered it differently. In any event, by the late sixties, when she was in her early twenties, it was clear that Yvonne was permanently junked. Her addiction to what some people called "stuff" affected everything she touched, including the lives of her mother and grandmother, with whom she shared a house, on Dean Street, in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, that had a small front yard with a tree of heaven, which in spring and summer stank.

These three women lived in what a caseworker might call "socio-isolation," meaning that their frame of reference was limited to themselves. Yvonne's mother, Carmen, and her grandmother, Bea, who was my mother's aunt, were despair junkies. They watched their young charge with impassive stares and lived according to the clock set by her addiction. Yvonne was tyrannical in her dependence—on them and on drugs. When she was high, she had the force field of a movie star. She had beautiful legs and breasts, though her hands had been thickened by edema—they looked like Billie Holiday's fat fingers. But it was her face you couldn't take your eyes off: it was as if the chemicals she'd ingested had carved out a mask, a visual image of what drugs made her feel.

Yvonne lived on the same block as a nursing home, around the corner from a statue of a Civil War hero—Ulysses S. Grant—on a mysterious street with dark-leafed trees, wide, shadowy sidewalks, and respectable parents watering their little front yards as their children played: a James Agee's "Death in the Family" kind of street. Yvonne was the rowdiest thing on the block. When she stumbled up the sidewalk, her thick, black-framed glasses—the kind that welfare paid for—sliding down her pug nose, and the straps of her sandals slipping over the backs of her cracked heels, her helplessness was a disgrace, but it was also sexy, at least to the boys who were playing a game of skelly in the street. Sometimes she talked to those boys as she walked past their yards and the wobbly steel fences that went up whenever houses were torn down. Sometimes, on her way home, she sat and nodded off for a few moments, a strung-out movie star, still clutching the paper bag with the carton of milk or bottle of Pepsi-Cola she had gone out to get hours before—when she was supposed to be taking a quick trip to the store and ended up like this. The paper bag was always wet with refrigerator perspiration and in danger of splitting in half, like her dress, which could barely contain her.

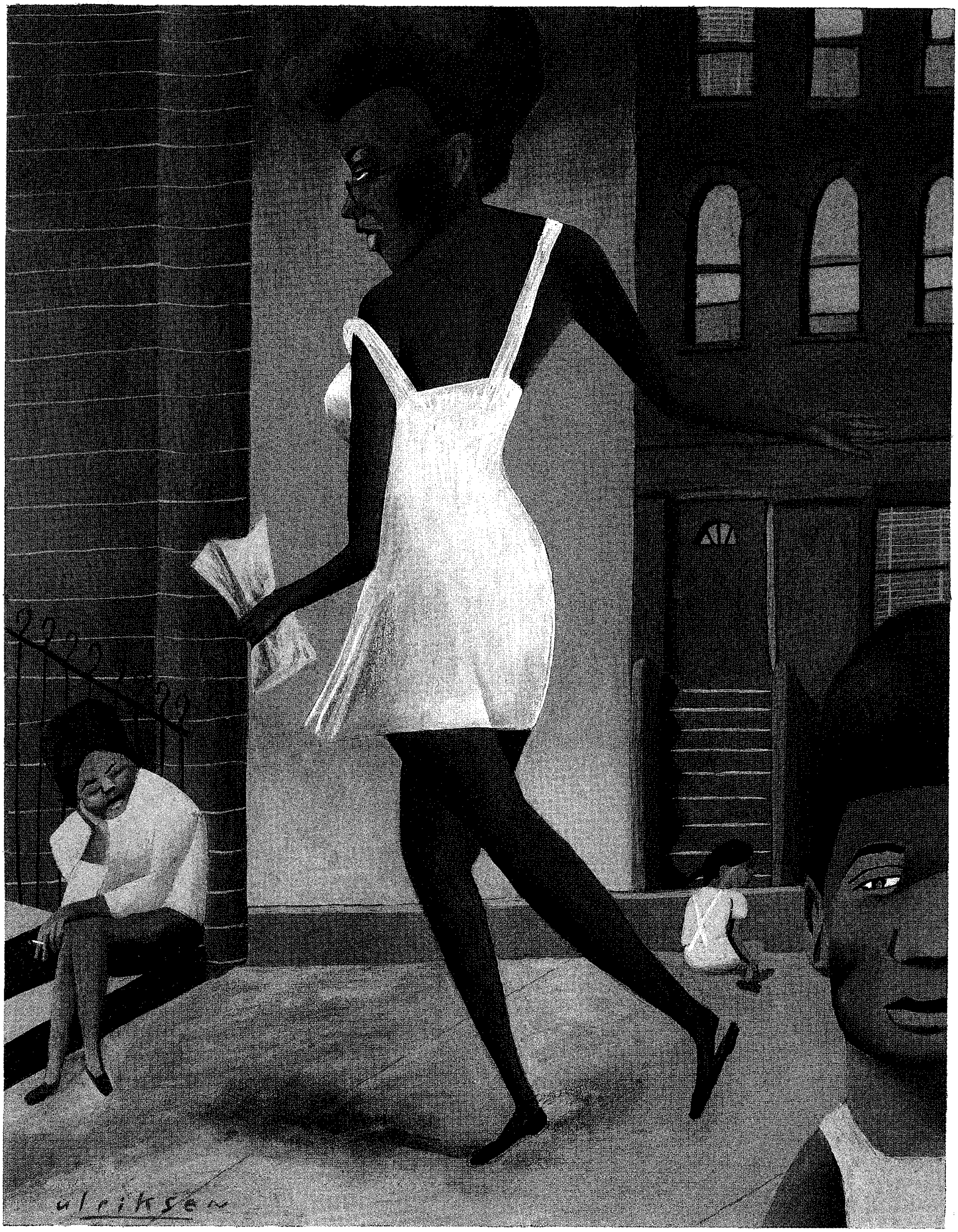
"That's why they took them chirren away, you know," the neighborhood women, who had known her since she was a little girl, used to say. "Them damn drugs and wut'less men and t'ing. God bless her. First one man, a dog, then another man, no more wut' than a mongoose. The girl was thirteen, I tell ya, when them had to cart the first child away. She kept having them chirren, wanting someone to love her, the way she wanted to love them."

Yvonne was darker than her mother, who was very light-skinned—almost yellow—and bandy-legged. Carmen wore a wig that was too big for her big-eyed head, and it seemed to twirl on her scalp whenever she chastised Yvonne on the street, in front of the neighbors, to show them that she was an interested and concerned mother, though in truth she was only vaguely interested and not especially concerned.

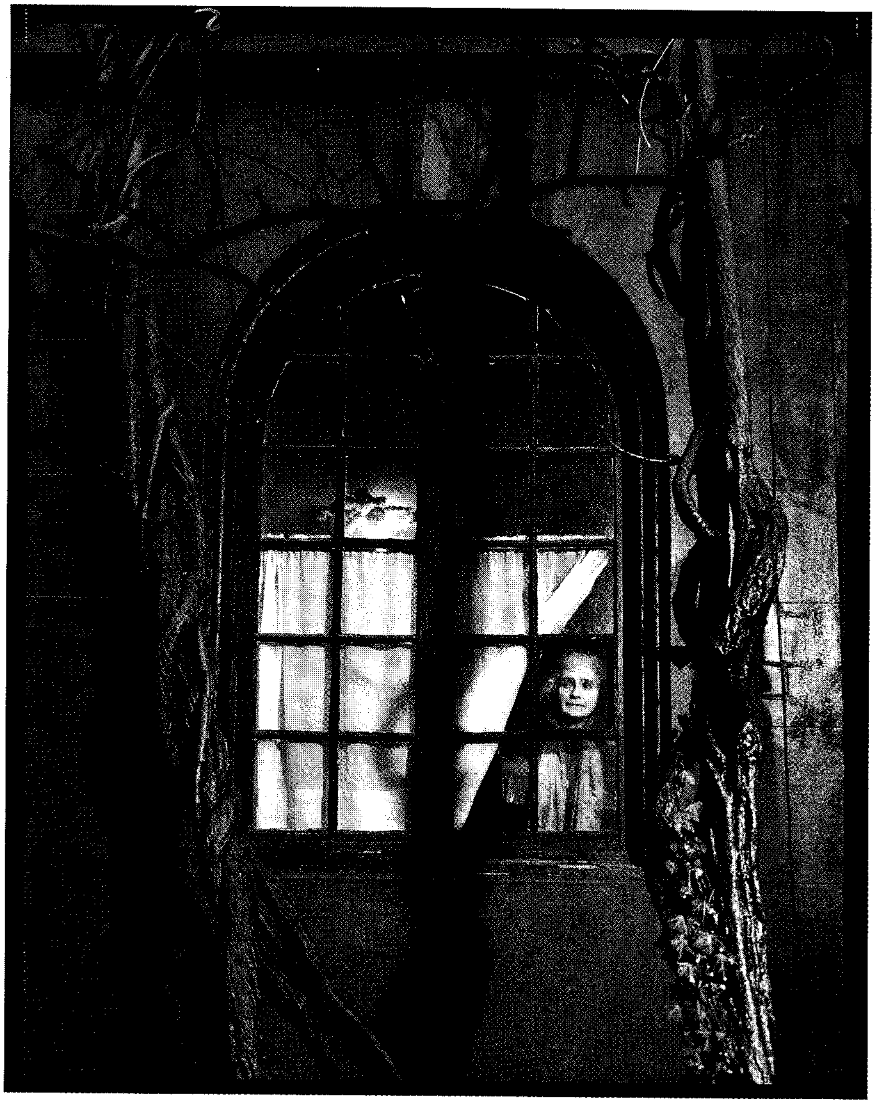
Bea: Yvonne's strong-willed and ugly grandmother. She was my mother's favorite aunt, but she was nothing like my optimistic mother—not a listener, not a sympathizer. She referred to every man she met as "a little piece of man," and whenever she or her daughter had a boyfriend she made sure she got money out of him. It was Bea who had worked and saved after moving here from Barbados, who had bought a "little piece of house"—a four-story brownstone, with a set of concrete steps leading up to the great wooden doors of the parlor-floor entrance. She rented out the top three floors and lived with Yvonne and Carmen in the basement apartment. She also played the numbers and made good money on the weekends selling souse, stewed and fried chicken, fish cakes, rice and peas, salt fish and *coocoo*, coconut bread, and homemade ginger beer and sorrel. In a sense, Yvonne became an addict in order to put an end to all that upward mobility: heroin eradicated race, class, and ambition.

YVONNE was one of my first lessons in class differences among Negroes. Despite the dopey "I'm Black and I'm Proud" atmosphere of the seventies, the Barbadians, Cubans, Panamanians, Antiguans, Arubans, and Grenadines of Yvonne's community felt superior to the "American blacks" in every way. They themselves were not "just black." They had chosen to come here, as opposed to having been sent here by some historical episode, like slavery or the great migration North. And though they, too, had a history of slavery, they had been emancipated for years back home. Besides, back home they were the majority. They did not revere white people (whom they called "pork"), but they coveted their money and their

MARK ULRIKSEN



Yvonne had the force field of a movie star: it was as if the drugs she ingested carved out an image of what they made her feel.



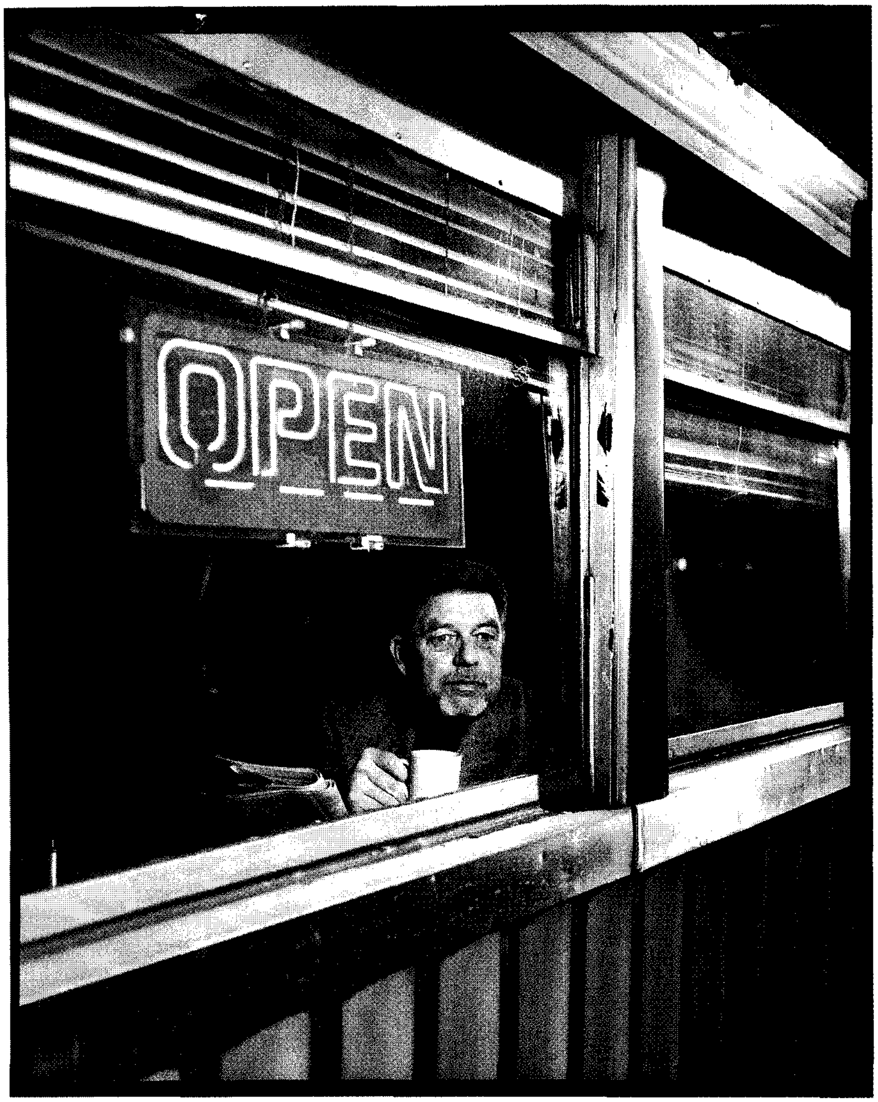
GRACE PALEY, *short-story writer and essayist, Chelsea, January 24, 1999.*

power. The West Indians, who were sometimes called "black Jews," considered themselves well educated, and they knew how to stretch a dollar. They moved into New York's traditionally black neighborhoods—Crown Heights, Bedford-Stuyvesant, the outer fringes of Flatbush—and took advantage of the jobs available to them, as domestics, handymen, nurses' aides, accountants. They made down payments on houses, and they stuck together. They were better parents, better citizens, better workers, they claimed, than the "wut'-less" and indolent American blacks.

According to the West Indians, American blacks—"niggers"—hung out in pool halls on Fulton Street and lived in run-down one-story shingled houses near the elevated train that connected them to the IND and Coney Island. Their children survived on jawbreakers and Kool-Aid and always seemed to have runny noses. Their mothers, who never bothered to send them to their dirty, crowded schools, had processed hair and wore grease-stained head rags. The men those women slept with were junkies or numbers runners and used them for sex, then ignored the children that their so-called unions produced.

Like most immigrants, the West Indians tried to define themselves through a politics of exclusion that required a kind of blindness. The fact that there were illegitimate children, single-parent households, and numbers runners in Yvonne's community somehow escaped notice. But Yvonne, more than anyone else in her neighborhood, showed up the fantasy. She had no desire to "pull herself up." I don't think she ever had much of a job and whatever money she had she used for drugs and alcohol, which, in the eyes of her community, were black-American vices. When she cracked open a Pabst Blue Ribbon on her stoop, her pupils flecked with white and focussed on her internal world, I was drawn to her less because of the pathos surrounding her, which bordered on corny, than because she had chosen to turn her slightly curved back on her entire culture.

DADDY lived with his parents, on the same block of Dean Street as Yvonne, in a big house on that street of big houses. He had never lived with or married my mother, though she had

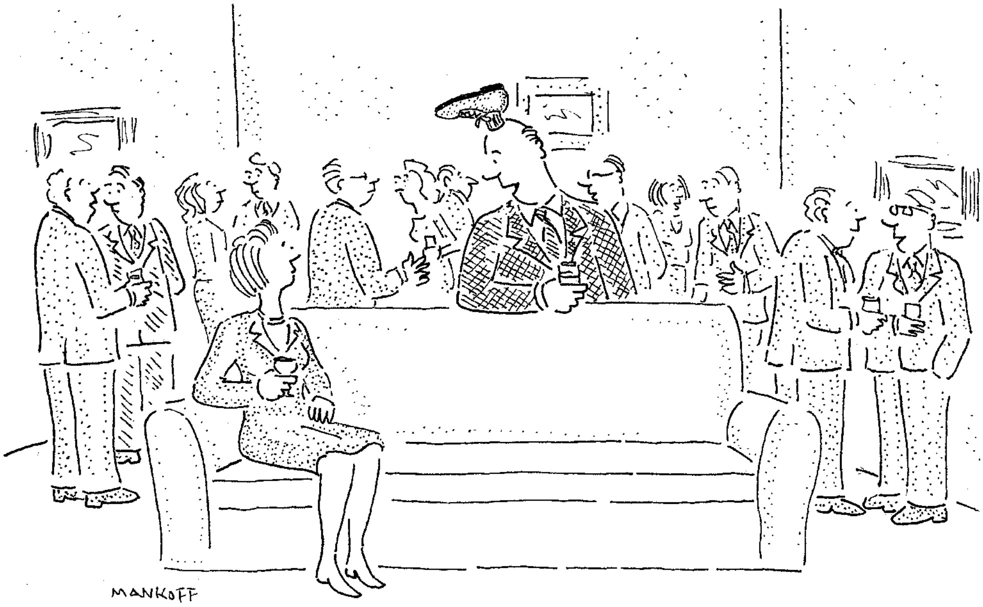


PETE HAMILL, *reporter and novelist, Hell's Kitchen, January 29, 1999.*

given birth to four of his children. I lived with her, one of my four older sisters, and my little brother, in Flatbush, a thirty-minute bus ride away from my father. In Flatbush, we rented the top floor of a two-story house just off Rogers Avenue. There was a tree of heaven in our yard, too, which also stank, and the earth underneath it was the color of rust: the previous tenant, in a fit of industry, had overfertilized the soil. There was a bodega next door and, next to that, a gas station. Past Rogers Avenue was Flatbush Avenue, which was big and wide and was home to a movie theatre, several kosher delis, a large Macy's, and Erasmus Hall High School. No one ever got tired of saying that Barbra Streisand had gone there, but you could tell that the Jews were already leaving Flatbush when we moved there, in the early seventies, and the West Indians were moving in.

When I visited my father—or stayed with him while my mother was hospitalized with respiratory problems or diabetic reactions that were sometimes life-threatening—I'd often see Yvonne. She had thick lips and a white crust in the corners of her mouth. Her breath smelled of Ripple, and her dress was sour. There was no way of reaching her—that's what her smudged and lonely, depthless eyes said to me. One time, when I was eight, my mother and I were going to my father's house, and she came up to us on the street. It didn't matter that Yvonne was in disgrace with the other West Indians; my mother hugged her. My mother loved other women, no matter what. As we watched Yvonne walk away, nodding and stumbling and giggling dryly, toward the disapproving women who constituted her home and life, my mother said, "Poor girl, if only they hadn't taken all her children away." She may have squeezed my hand then, but maybe not; she wasn't sentimental.

Neither was Daddy's mother. She was a brilliant businesswoman, who owned an apartment building. She was a tall, light-skinned woman. The dark irises of her brown eyes were rimmed with blue; they looked like bits of sapphire embedded in a wooden cigar-store-Indian face. Her cleavage often smelled like money: she used her bra as a purse, doling out dollars to handymen and children. Although her husband had stopped sharing her bedroom, she stayed married to



"Hey, I'm just happy the transplant worked at all."

him for appearances' sake: being able to hold a family together was proof of her superior organizational skills—proof that she was better than those "slew-footed" women who came over here with children but no man, and soon acquired a mortgage, trying to step up in class, into her class. In Barbados, she had been gentry; the landscape had changed, but her values hadn't. She refused to acknowledge Yvonne.

She doted on Daddy. She fed him huge steaks and the choicest part of her Easter leg of lamb. As long as she was around, he didn't need a wife, though he had married someone once, no one can remember whom. When I think of Daddy in that neighborhood, the word "mayoral" comes to mind. He was handsome enough to make any woman happy, or, at least, to set the standard of her unhappiness—as attractive as a matinée idol, a brown-skinned John V. Lindsay. He was respectful to his elders and courteous to children, other than his own. At home, he complained constantly about how hard he worked and how much he gave his children, though he didn't work and he gave his children little.

He didn't take drugs, but he was as interested in disaster as Yvonne was in embodying it. He devoured the newspapers and believed every melodramatic word they printed. He read about the collapsing economy and the boy who pushed the old woman to her death on the subway tracks, and although he loved certain parts of what he always called "the city"—the trenchcoated office workers on Fifth Avenue eating lunch at Schrafft's, the Forty-second Street Library, the German food in Yorkville—he also developed a rabid fear of it and its tax evaders, hookers, transit workers, and dopers. And he seemed to react to women with that same love and contempt.

One afternoon, when I was twelve and Daddy was taking me on a bus trip into the city, he told me about Yvonne: *She was always affectionate*, I remember him saying. *She was a little girl once, you know, not all fucked up. Your mother was close to Bea, so she saw the family more than I did, but Yvonne always made a point of greeting me. She wasn't screwed up. She hadn't had those children yet.* He told me that Yvonne had begun to change when she was thirteen. As a teen-ager, he said, she had the fully developed body of a woman and the mind of a child. He remembered that once—he would have been in his late thirties at the time—Yvonne had run toward him and wrapped her firm legs around him, something she had always done in the past, but this time it felt like a grown woman wrapping her legs around him and he pushed her away. After that, he avoided her. Daddy, being Daddy, seemed to feel that she had never got over that rejection. It was a drama he must have reënacted in his mind again and again.

That he could take the credit for her despair is a measure of how powerful his imagination was—so powerful that, before your eyes, he could transform himself into the iconoclast he thought he was. Although he had pushed her away, Yvonne became inextricably linked to him in my mind. I felt her legs pressing against my father's waist, and my jealousy knew no bounds: she was my father's love. My mother wasn't, nor was I. It seemed to me that in order to understand what pleased my father I would have to understand who Yvonne was—and I did once, at a party, where I watched her flirt with a man who was younger than she was. I followed them upstairs and saw them fucking in a darkened bedroom. She gripped him hard, her glasses on the floor beside her. Her thighs, which my father had described as firm, looked liquid.

WHEN I think of Yvonne now, I feel the sense of terrible excitement and danger that infiltrated the neighborhood where my father lived. Drugs were breaking down the normal order of things, eating away at the world as Daddy had known it. More and more, in the newspapers and on TV, there were stories about kids on stuff selling it in schoolyards. There were commercials, sponsored by the Ad Council, that showed stoned white kids with the voice-over slogan "Why do you think they call it dope?" When I was eleven or so, my brother and I went to a Boy Scout recruitment meeting on Newkirk Avenue. As part of our initiation into group moral rectitude, we were required to watch a film. It was about a young white woman with close-cut blond hair. She wore white pants, a white shirt, and no makeup. She had pitted skin. There was a vaguely masculine air about her: she looked like the kind of woman whom West Indians called "mannish" and black Americans called a "bull dagger." She was a drug addict who lived in the city. She stole from friends and family. She lied to them, too, in an effort to cover up her addiction to what she called "the big H." At the film's climax, just as we were about to cover our eyes so as not to see her shooting up, an arm extended through a slit in the screen and the actress we had just seen projected on the screen walked through it, like Orpheus, before our horrified eyes.

At first, because of the ads and the propaganda films, I associated drugs with white people, and I did not associate white people with my family. Only white people would be crazy enough to steal and to murder their own mothers to get drugs, I assumed. But pretty soon other relatives—mostly on my mother's side—started using drugs, and pretty soon drugs became "raceless." Daddy introduced me to the wider world of drugs through reports he read to me from the *Post* or the *News* about black boys strung out on stuff, about that stuff eating up young bodies, just like Yvonne's. *That world will kill you, it will steal your soul,* Daddy often said. *God damn it, what's today coming to? In my time, there was no such thing, no such thing at all.* His stories scared me so much that one night when I saw a family friend smoking pot (she was a married woman, in her late twenties) I burst into tears. She was on drugs, those terrible drugs. And what about her soul? "What soul are you talking about?" she asked. "The sole of my shoe?"

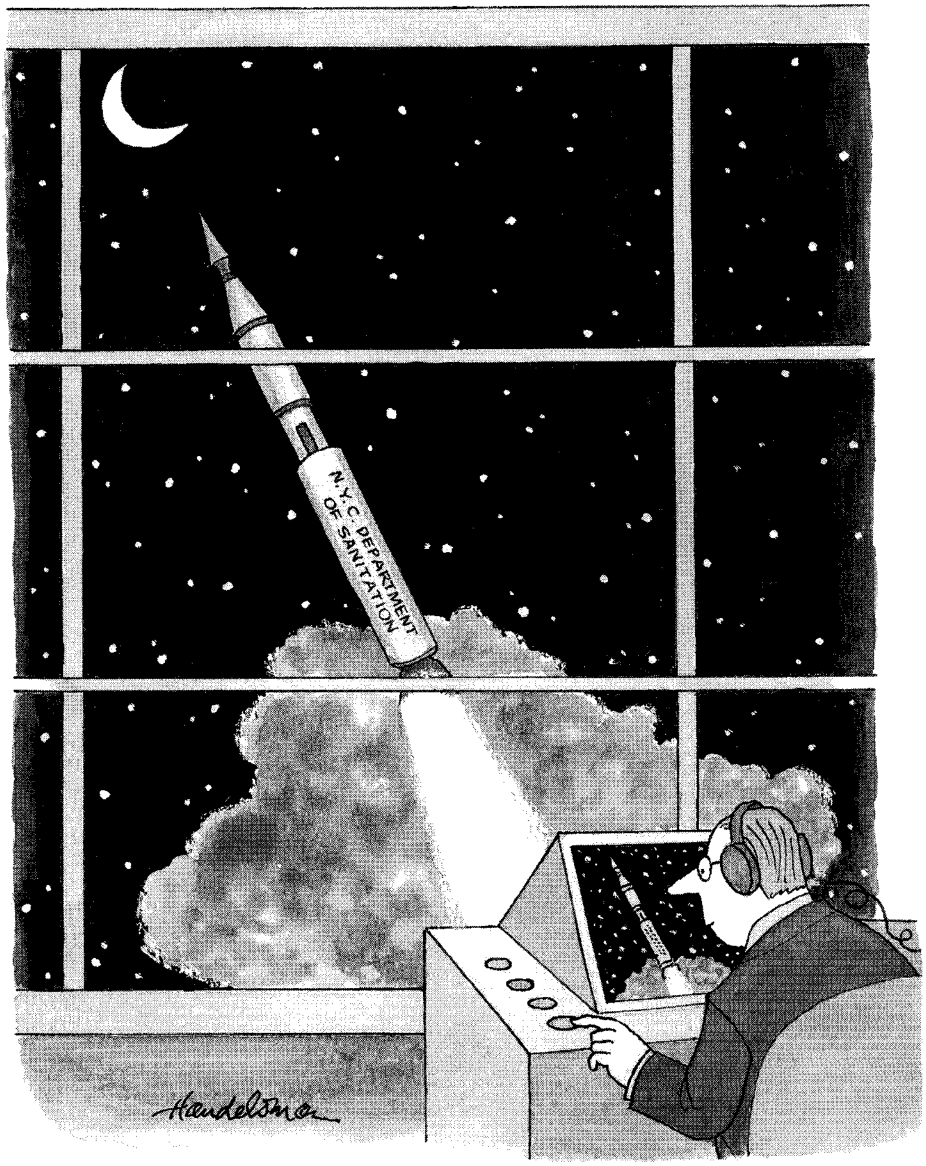
But I also took a lurid interest in Daddy's stories. I loved hearing about the damage that drugs did, about how a family had been "torn apart" by a junkie son, and so on. I was drawn not by the pain of the stories but by the fact that some child, some mother's son, had been able to break his family bonds simply by opening up a vein. It occurs to me now that my father's recitations on drugs and on the treachery of girls (they grow up, they take drugs) were an attempt to be paternal—or, at any rate, a male presence in my life, though his actual presence was relatively rare. When I did see him or stay with him, he imposed harsh disciplinary measures so that my brother and I wouldn't end up sniffing glue, like the boys I saw on the street.

After a while, though, I began to realize that Daddy didn't really know that much about drugs. I started to read the newspapers, too, and where he saw doom I saw people having experiences. In my junior-high reading club, I discovered Alice Childress's brilliant novel "A Hero Ain't Nothin' but a Sandwich," about a thirteen-year-old black heroin addict. Benjie was the boy Daddy had warned me about, a statistic from the tabloids. Drugs were part of his sociological profile: bad schools, a single mother, a childhood in a ghetto whose crumbling mortar is heroin. But I was enthralled by Benjie's story, and his voice was as thrilling and soothing as I imagined heroin to be:

> When I was a chile, me and my mother was cool with each other, got along just fine. . . . My mother used to help go over my homework and we be watch our TV too: Do little homework, then look up and dig TV when the chase go on, or the mystery bout to be solve and the bad guy caught. I had me a happy childhood.

I also read "Go Ask Alice," by Anonymous, the story of a high-school girl who smoked pot and then "graduated," as my guidance counsellors liked to say, to harder stuff. "Alice" was everything the West Indians I grew up with abhorred in white people. Many of the West Indian women I knew made their living taking care of white children. They mocked the people they worked for—their liberalism, their habit of "discussing" problems. They thought that these "reasonable" parents were ridiculous, and they hated the petulant white girls who yelled at their mothers, stole Valium, and demanded credit cards, just as they would have hated Alice. But I took a perverse interest in her. So much of my day at that time was spent trying not to burden my sick mother that reading about drugs was as close to flipping out as I could get.

By the time the TV movie of "Go Ask Alice" came out, in 1972, I couldn't read or see enough about drug-addicted women, perhaps because I saw my mother's illness—her insulin, her constant need to be medicated—as an addiction, a link to Yvonne, which made my mother just one more in a line of rough women



in her family: women who failed, who fell ill, who claimed me as one of their own, and who never rose to the level of refinement or style I saw on my father's side. My mother's illness was so enduring and so serious that nothing else seemed quite real in comparison.

After school, on our old black-and-white television, I watched Ella Fitzgerald's performance as Shelley Winters's strung-out friend in "Let No Man Write My Epitaph" and Kitty Winn's portrayal of a good girl strung out on heroin in "Panic in Needle Park," and those drug-addled women seemed to me like subterranean creatures, crawing briefly out from under the giant rock that the Forbidden City was built on. They were naked, but determined to survive. They were like my mother, only different, I thought, because they could "kick" when they felt like it.

IN 1975, when I was fourteen, I went to a high school in the city. Drugs didn't kill me there, as Daddy had said they would, but they did harm someone I fell in love with. (I have changed her name and a few other details.) Selina was slim-hipped and flat-assed and wore jeans that I think were designed by Gloria Vanderbilt or Jordache. She looked like a very young Greta Garbo, though her genealogy was not Scandinavian: her mother was Puerto Rican and her father was Jewish. They lived in Turtle Bay and invited me to their Passover dinner. Selina was their eldest child, and I thought she was the greatest actress I had ever seen. She would have been captivating on film; she was subtle and she photographed beautifully, and she had a striking speaking voice—deep, with an even deeper laugh.

When Puerto Rican men made lewd comments about her, she cursed back in Spanish, which they had assumed she didn't speak because she looked white. She smoked long menthol cigarettes and walked like a dancer. She charged makeup to her mother's account and pretended to know nothing about it when the bill came in; when she bleached her hair, she pretended she had fallen asleep under a sunlamp. She smoked pot and did acid in high school—when I did neither. She introduced me to Sergio Mendes and Brasil '66. She taught me to make long-distance phone calls and to buy on credit. She had a dog, a white poodle, and she had her own bedroom, with a large aquarium filled with dry coral and no fish. (I shared a pullout couch with my brother.)

Other girls didn't like Selina, who cried and was histrionic and brilliant; they said she was "sharp"—meaning too fabulous for them. And Selina didn't like other girls. She saw in them what she loathed in herself: her dependence on men to tell her who she was. Her compulsiveness, her self-destructiveness tied her in my mind to Yvonne, and to my mother: only I would be desperate enough to love these women, and that meant that only I would be loved by them in return.

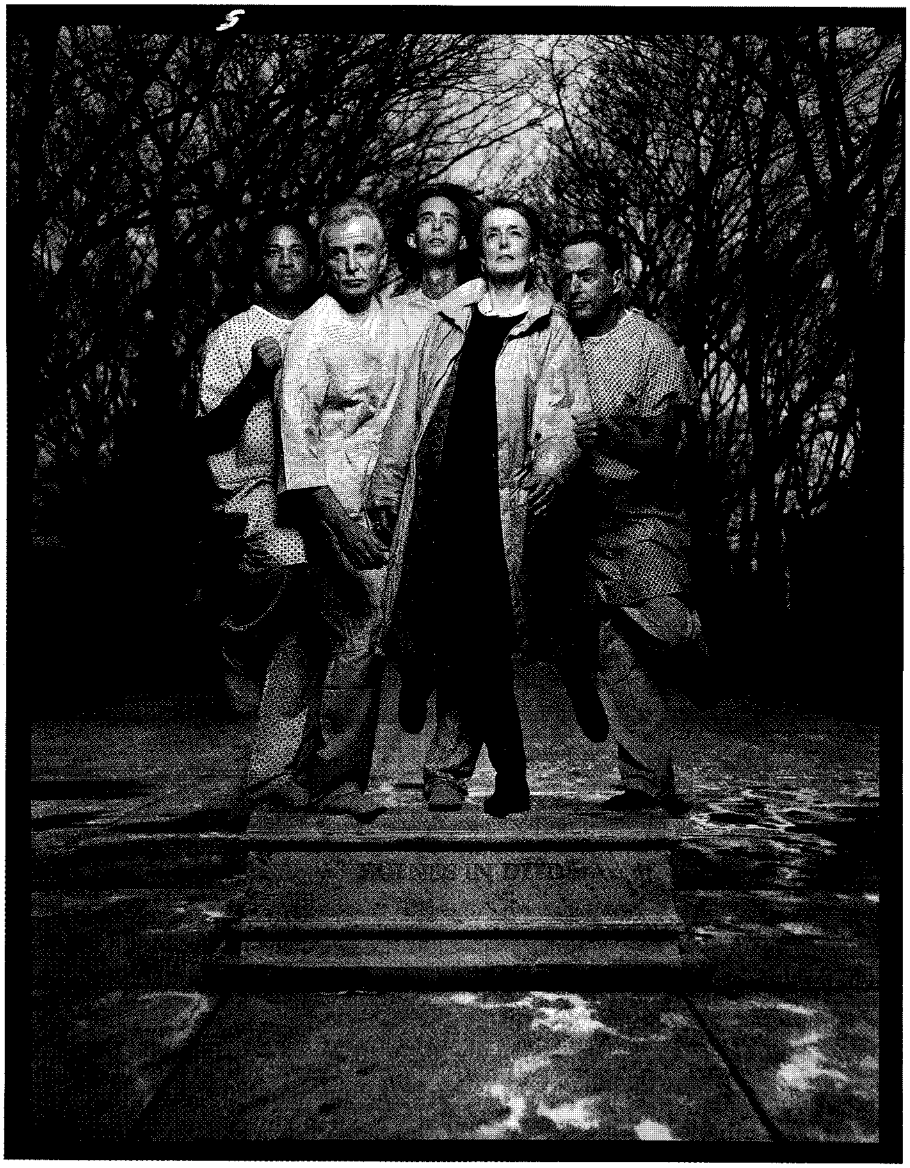
Selina was the only woman I ever brought home. She rarely left Manhattan, so one Sunday afternoon I met her at the I.R.T. station at Forty-second Street to make sure that she didn't get lost. There she was, going to Crown Heights (we had moved there from Flatbush two years earlier). I felt both sickened and fascinated by the sight of her white skin and blond hair among all those black faces. She talked and talked on the subway, refusing to acknowledge the stares of black passengers. I fixed my eyes on her chipped rose-colored nail polish so as not to show my desire for an almost white girl in front of them.

When we arrived at my house, I cursed my mother's taste in furniture. The brilliance I saw in Selina showed everything up: the ugly pink crushed-velvet couch covered in plastic, the old blue easy chair. My mother sat in the living room, stunned by the presence of a female who was not part of the family and yet was associated with her son. ("She has his nose wide open!" she told a cousin of mine later.) She had prepared rice and peas for dinner, and Selina went, uninvited, into the kitchen to taste the food, adding a few of the spices she liked, while I stood in the doorway, looking at her small brown suède shoes and her back bent over the greasy oven, amazed by her defiance.

Like other high-school girls, Selina experimented with her mother's barbiturates. Sometimes she would be exaggeratedly "stoned." At parties, she would stand in circles dominated by handsome boys and smoke their pot. For a time, she fell in love with my closest male friend, Larry, who happened to be gay, and who has since died, from AIDS. He was tall and muscular and blond and was sexually interested in anyone who was interested in him. I watched Selina kiss him once on our high-school fire escape and was overcome by jealousy—in love with them both. Many boys loved Selina, but back then she liked me best, because I listened to her and understood the depression that goes with being popular, beautiful, and compulsive. She folded me into her drama for a time, but as she graduated from pot to other drugs she began to fight with or lose touch with her friends. She married a boy from our high school, moved West, and had a child. Then she returned to New York, and there were stories of her, strung out, living alone. I heard that she had given her child to her parents to take care of for a while. I saw her once, years later, working behind a bar. Until we spoke, she pretended she didn't know me.

After I "broke up" with Selina, I began to try to exorcise my fascination with drugs and drug-addicted women. The white girls who were my college friends wore black Monica-Vitti-in-"L'Avventura" dresses and snorted coke in the bathrooms of those clubs of the early eighties—the Rock Lounge, Tier 3, Save the Robots, the Continental, the World—but I rarely joined them (and only rarely did any drugs at all). Like Selina, my college friends used drugs as a challenge to one another and to the world: they could withstand anything in order to get what they wanted, to transform themselves into something other than their mothers. But by the nineties most of them had given up drugs and had married and had children. They had embraced the kind of ambition that once embarrassed them. Sometimes they were defensive about their choices and didn't want to discuss the sex they'd had, the drugs they'd taken. In the end, they had little interest in the transforming liberation they'd been chasing after years before.

HAD Yvonne been looking for that liberation? Yvonne, with her big eyes and smudged glasses: did I imagine it or did they have to "put her away" once, after she'd been forced to give up one of her children? I don't remember

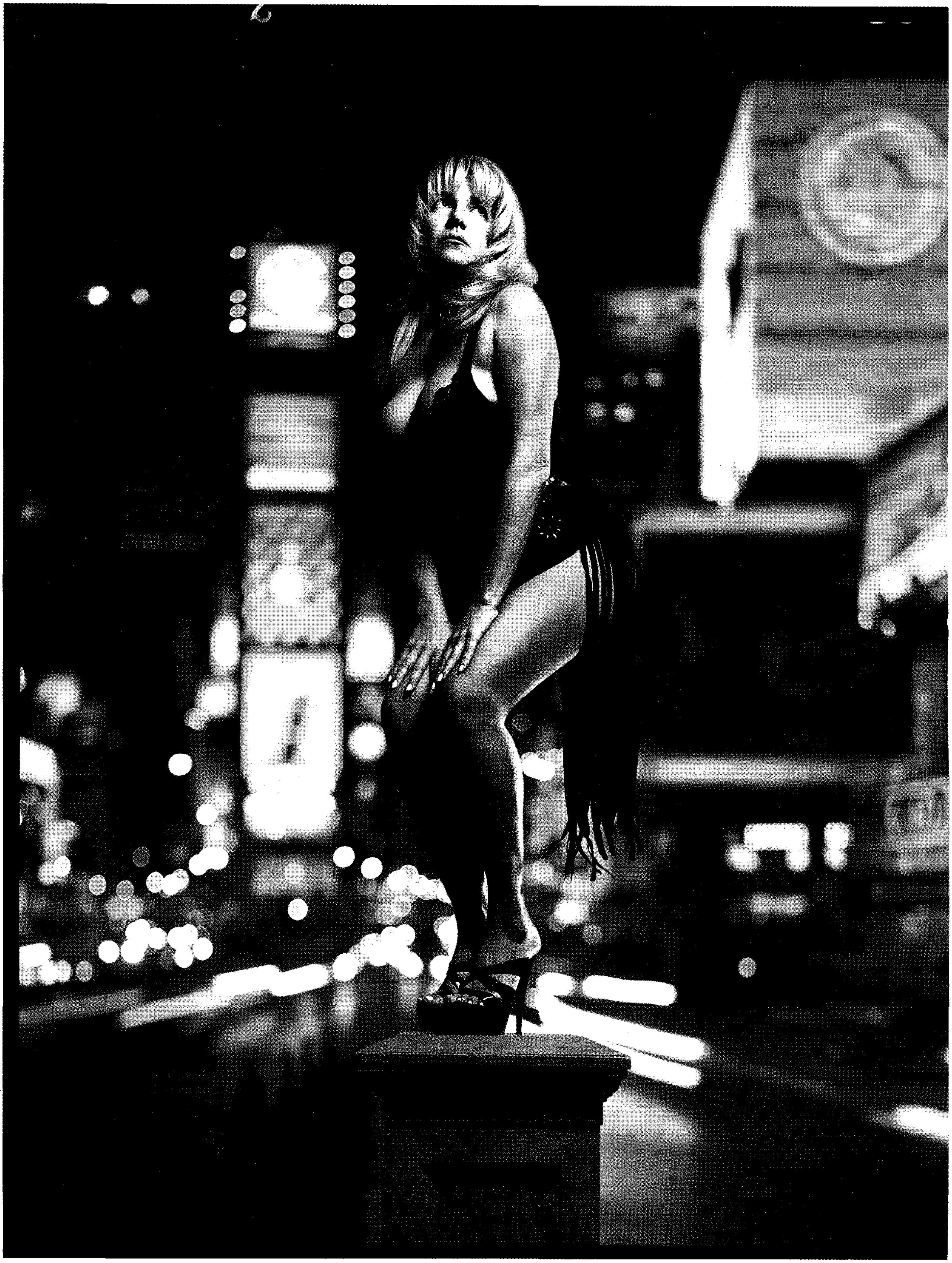


CYNTHIA O'NEAL, *president of Friends In Deed, an organization for people who have life-threatening illnesses, with Michael Jones, Greg Irving, Ken Davis, and Hans Koch, Riverside Park, January 14, 1999.*

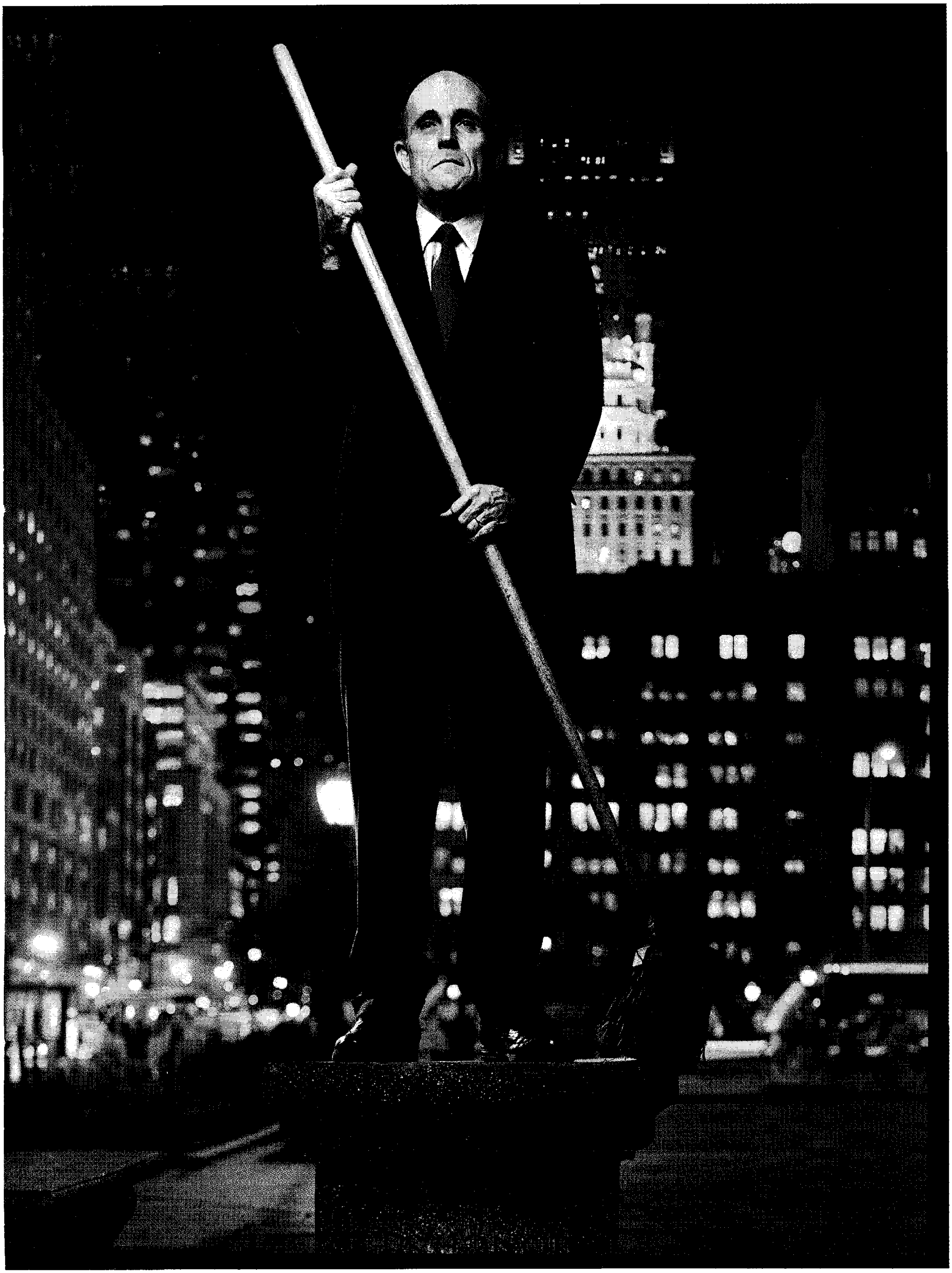
her voice, but I can picture her speaking with extraordinary verbal skill—a skill that all junkies seem to have, and use to con people. Describing her and knowing so little, I find myself slipping into fiction. I want every story to end nicely, and from time to time I like to imagine who Yvonne would have been if she had moved out of the neighborhood where she was born. Maybe she wouldn't have done drugs at all. Maybe she would have been a star on the Recovery Channel—the Aimee Semple McPherson of her generation. Or maybe she'd have ended up in Haight-Ashbury, thriving on drugs and love for strangers. She was, indeed, a "love freak"—made so stupid and bereft by love lost, gained, and lost again that she probably believed there was a chance for blissful community.

Yvonne, with her dirty bra straps poking out of a black-and-white polka-dot top, was a junkie until she died, in 1979, when I was eighteen and she was in her thirties. I think her liver finally failed her. Her death was unremarkable—its impact felt only in the erotic lives of a few men. I don't know much about her death, probably because my own grandmother—Daddy's mother—had died some time before and the big house where she'd lived with my father had been torn down. The last time I looked, there was only an empty lot left.

Yvonne's death also got lost somewhere in the death of the neighborhood as we knew it. There was an influx of poor American blacks and an exodus of West Indians to Queens. A dead girl fucked on booze or dope doesn't matter much in a neighborhood that is continually fighting for its survival. Everyone wants to move on. And black Americans and West Indians have never had much belief in history: it doesn't really tell them who they've been or where they've come from. Yvonne was the first woman I met who rejected her own culture, who replaced history with self-invention. But once she had started inventing herself she never quite understood what she'd invented or what she had to offer. She didn't know what to do with herself, so she did drugs. ♦



ROBIN BYRD, *host of a cable-access adult-entertainment show, Times Square, January 17, 1999.*



RUDOLPH GIULIANI, *Mayor of New York City, Fifth Avenue and Fifty-ninth Street, January 29, 1999.*

LIFE AND LETTERS

JOE MITCHELL'S SECRET

The eloquence of a great writer's silence.

BY MARK SINGER

ONLY the most mule-headed writer, or maybe only the luckiest and least distractible, willingly pursues wire to wire a single theme. Joseph Mitchell grew up a cotton and tobacco grower's son in Fairmont, a small town in southeastern North Carolina. His father had hoped he'd join the family enterprise but gave up when it became plain that his oldest child, though an otherwise fine student, could never get the hang of multiplication and long division. He arrived in New York in the fall of 1929, when he was twenty-one, and found work as a newspaper reporter. A couple of years later, briefly "sick of the whole business," he went to sea aboard a Russia-bound freighter, then returned to reporting. For another sixty-five years he stayed at it, until the spring of 1996, when he died and created an unfillable hole in the city and at *The New Yorker*, where he'd joined the staff in 1938. Death meant repatriation, figurative and literal—to a specific spot in the sandy soil beneath a slight rise in a treeless field bordered on one side by a swamp, on another by sweet gums, pines, and oaks, and on another by farmland planted with rotating crops of soybeans, corn, and winter wheat. This was a destination he'd contemplated since 1964, when his mother died and his father invested in a family burial plot. Mitchell was a connoisseur of graveyards, a pensive but not necessarily gloomy necropolitan tourist, and a virtuoso of what he called "graveyard humor." In one of his most arresting reporting pieces, "Mr. Hunter's Grave," he described the pleasure of wandering with "a wild-flower book and a couple of sandwiches in my pockets" among the old graveyards on the south shore of Staten Island. Such constitutionals consistently had a tonic effect: "For some reason I don't know and don't want to know, after I have spent an hour or so in one of these cemeteries, looking at gravestone designs and reading inscriptions and identifying wild flowers and scaring rabbits out of the weeds and reflecting on the end that awaits me and awaits us all, my spirits lift, I become quite cheerful, and then I go for a long walk."

Staten Island, especially its faded oystering and truck-farming settlements, must have reminded Mitchell of the Carolina coastal plains. Leaving home, he shouldered the classic burden—a mixture of resolve and regret—and this ambivalence was implicit in the elegiac rustle of his prose. "The rats of New York are quicker-witted than those on farms, and they can outthink any man who has not made a study of their habits," he wrote in a 1944 story. "Even so, they spend most of their lives in a state of extreme anxiety, the black rats dreading the brown and both species dreading human beings. Away from their nests, they are usually on the edge of hysteria." From "Obituary of a Gin Mill," which was published in 1939: "Dick's old place was dirty and it smelled like the zoo, but it was genuine; his new place is as shiny and undistinguished as a two-dollar alarm clock. The bar-equipment salesman was so relentless that Dick, who merely wanted a bigger kitchen, ended up by keeping nothing but the big, greasy, iron safe and a framed and fly-specked photograph of Gallant Fox. He even threw away all his photographs of Lupe Velez, his favorite movie actress." Mitchell accepted New York City and its citizens as he found them. Even when he witnessed human spectacles that saddened or disgusted him, he maintained a compulsive curiosity and an evergreen sense of wonder. His preferred reporting subjects, he once explained, were "visionaries, obsessives, impostors, fanatics, lost souls, the-end-is-near street preachers, old Gypsy kings and old Gypsy queens, and out-and-out freak-show freaks." Without playing dumb, he had a country fellow's deadly ability to sniff out pretentiousness three avenues away. And he possessed extraordinary courtesy and patience as a listener, an aptitude nurtured during a childhood spent among folk who never tired of telling stories about themselves.

His reward was that, to the end of his life, people wanted to talk to him—a convenient bargain, given Mitchell's determination to render precisely the contents and cadences of the variegated New York vernacular. Of an encounter with the eponymous curator of Captain Charley's Private Museum for Intelligent People, he observed, "The last time I went to see him I took a notebook along, and while he rummaged through the museum—he was searching for a bone which he said he hacked off an Arab around 9 P.M. one full-moon night in 1907 after the Arab had been murdered for signing a treaty—I wrote down everything he said." In all five boroughs, he discovered "ear-benders" worthy of his perfectionism, but the greatest concentrations materialized on the Bowery, in Times Square, Harlem, and the Irish saloons of the East Side, and, above all, along the waterfront: "The only people I do not care to listen to are society women, industrial leaders, distinguished authors, ministers, explorers, moving picture actors (except W. C. Fields and Stepin Fetchit), and any actress under the age of thirty-five."

Mitchell's urban peregrinations per se were not his theme. Rather, they delineated a romantic quest, the trajectory of a polite but persistent intimate affection. New York City wasn't exactly what he thought of when the word "home"

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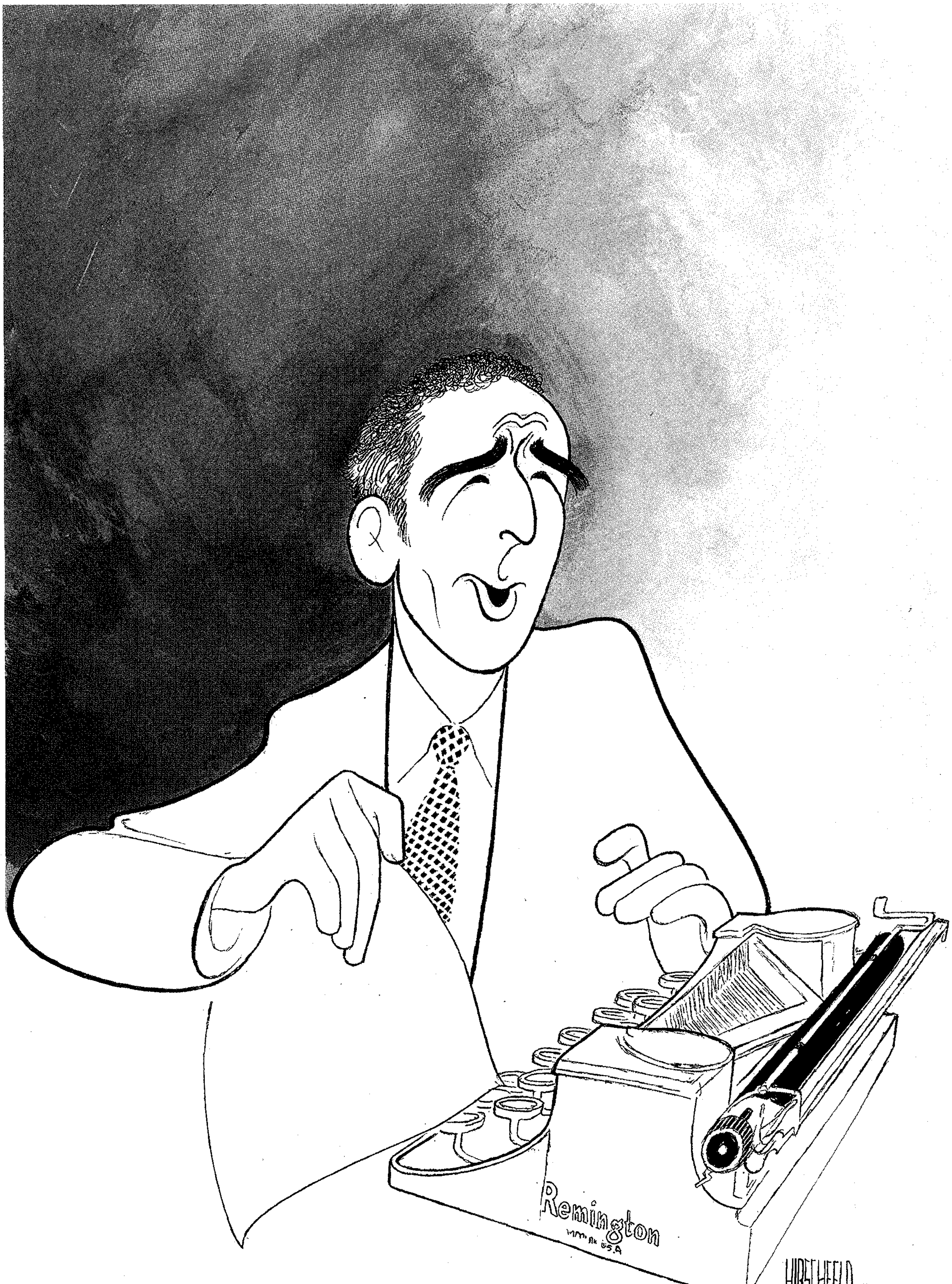
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Joseph Mitchell, a matchless chronicler of Gotham exotica, published his last article in 1964.

came to mind, but—in the same way that his avatar James Joyce responded to Dublin—it provoked and inspired him to write in a style no one previously had, and he loved it for what it was. There was, though, this important distinction: Joyce's early memories were rooted in Dublin, and Mitchell landed in New York already grown, so that it must have appeared to him no less strange than Mars. With a novelist's eye, he quickly made it familiar by mapping his own geography—transforming into landmarks an ordinary Greek coffee shop or a "big, roomy, jukeboxy" diner.

He had plenty of soft spots, but he was tough to fool. He never cheapened his stories with moist nostalgia or maudlin sentiment. Reporting in and about New York—recounting its inhabitants' daily adventures and dreamy follies, their resilience and their fragility—enabled Mitchell to sustain and reiterate his overarching conviction that the past, marinated in human memory and recollected in everyday speech, yields an elixir that can fortify against all manner of indignities inflicted in the name of progress.

DEPENDING upon who's remembering what, however, the past can also, of course, haunt and shackle; this became an unintended theme of Mitchell's later years. In 1938, he published his first book, "My Ears Are Bent," a collection of feature stories from the New York *Herald Tribune* and the *World-Telegram*. His second book, "McSorley's Wonderful Saloon" (1943), broadened and solidified his reputation as a matchless chronicler of Gotham exotica. The richly textured portraits include, among others, the owners and clientele of the ancient Cooper Square alehouse of the title story; Mazie P. Gordon, the brassy blond ticket seller at a dime movie theatre who, when she wasn't threatening obnoxious patrons ("Outa here on a stretcher! Knock your eyeballs out! . . . Big baboon! Every tooth in your head! Bone in your body!"), doled out daily fistfuls of small change to Bowery vagrants; Arthur Samuel Colborne, the founder and head of the Anti-Profanity League ("You start out with 'hell,' 'devil take it,' 'Dad burn it,' 'Gee whizz,' and the like of that, and by and by you won't be able to open your trap without letting loose an awful, awful, blasphemous oath. It's like the cocaine dope habit"); and Joseph Ferdinand Gould, a.k.a. Professor Sea Gull, a homeless Harvard-graduate Greenwich Village fixture, a mimic of seagulls who claimed to have "translated a number of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poems into sea gull," and the author of "An Oral History of Our Time," which Gould, in expansive moments, would compare to Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire." During several early encounters, Mitchell stayed up half the night with Gould, buying him drinks and recording his verbal incontinence. But Gould wasn't a solo self-promoter; a number of serious writers—Ezra Pound, E. E. Cummings, William Saroyan, Marianne Moore—took him seriously. The "Oral History," then twenty-six years in the works, had grown to an estimated nine million words, Mitchell wrote, and "may well be the lengthiest unpublished work in existence."

The pace of Mitchell's own word output, meanwhile, decelerated. Legging around town for newspapers, he had often reported and written three stories a day, an enervating regimen that made an assignment to file a daily dispatch from the trial of Bruno Hauptmann, the Lindbergh kidnapper, feel like a holiday. ("After a reporter has covered features for a while there is nothing like a fast murder trial to get the lead out of his pants. It discourages him from trying to make literature out of every little two by four news story.") In 1939, his most prolific year at *The New Yorker*, he had thirteen bylines, each one appended to an artifact of literature. However, in 1942, when "Professor Sea Gull" appeared, he published only one other piece, and the following year but a single Profile. For the next two decades, a Joseph Mitchell story ran in the magazine roughly every two years; almost all these small masterpieces were collected in two books, "Old Mr. Flood" and "The Bottom of the Harbor."

In the early sixties, Mitchell decided to revisit the life and legend of Joe Gould—"an odd and penniless and unemployable little man who came to the city in 1916 and ducked and dodged and held on as hard as he could for over thirty-five years." The result was a more melancholy than funny, full-of-surprises account of an elaborate but benign deception, as well as, indirectly, a deft psychological study of both the author and his subject. In the years after he first wrote about Gould, Mitchell gradually came to realize that—apart from several autobiographical chapters that weren't really oral history—"An Oral History of Our Time" didn't exist on paper. To tell the tale of his unnerving discovery, he

ABSOLUTELY! WHERE THERE'S SMOKE THERE'S FIRE.
SMOKEY
EXPERT WITNESS
Leo Cullum

felt obliged to interject his feelings about a reporter's duty to the people he writes about. Gould could be quite entertaining, and for the most part he elicited Mitchell's sympathy. But he was also an obsessive, an impostor, and a lost soul in one tidy bundle—not to mention neurotic, alcoholic, narcissistic, opportunistic, and prone to remind Mitchell, at critical moments, that he had, after all, invited himself into Gould's life. "Joe Gould's Secret" was serialized in two consecutive issues of *The New Yorker* in September, 1964, seven years after Gould's death, at sixty-eight, in a mental hospital. The following year, when Mitchell turned fifty-seven, it was published as a book. Whereupon the bylines ceased.

MITCHELL was a creature of steadfast habits. Each year he bought four Irish Sweepstakes tickets and displayed them on the mantelpiece in the apartment on West Tenth Street, between Fifth and Sixth Avenues, where he and his wife, Therese, raised their daughters, Nora and Elizabeth. He lived there fifty-six years—alone after Therese's death, in 1980. Every December 24th, he delighted the family with his reading of "'Twas the Night Before Christmas." Every summer, they spent about six weeks at the Mitchell homestead in North Carolina. He rose early each day and gargled for a full minute before his breakfast of orange juice, toast with marmalade or strawberry jam, and eggs (until his eighties, when some salmonella-tainted eggs made him sick). In New York, when he headed out the door he was dressed in Brooks Brothers clothing down to his underwear, socks, and wing tips. On the farm, he dressed in worn-out Brooks Brothers clothing. He wore gabardine or flannel suits and a felt fedora in winter, seersucker or poplin suits and a coconut-straw fedora in summer. In the seventies, when he deviated and bought a tweed sports jacket, Nora asked, "What's next, Daddy, muttonchop sideburns?" In his inside breast pocket he always carried a sheet of plain eight-and-a-half-by-eleven typing paper, folded horizontally in half and then in thirds, and a soft-leaded pencil. Throughout the day, he wrote things down.

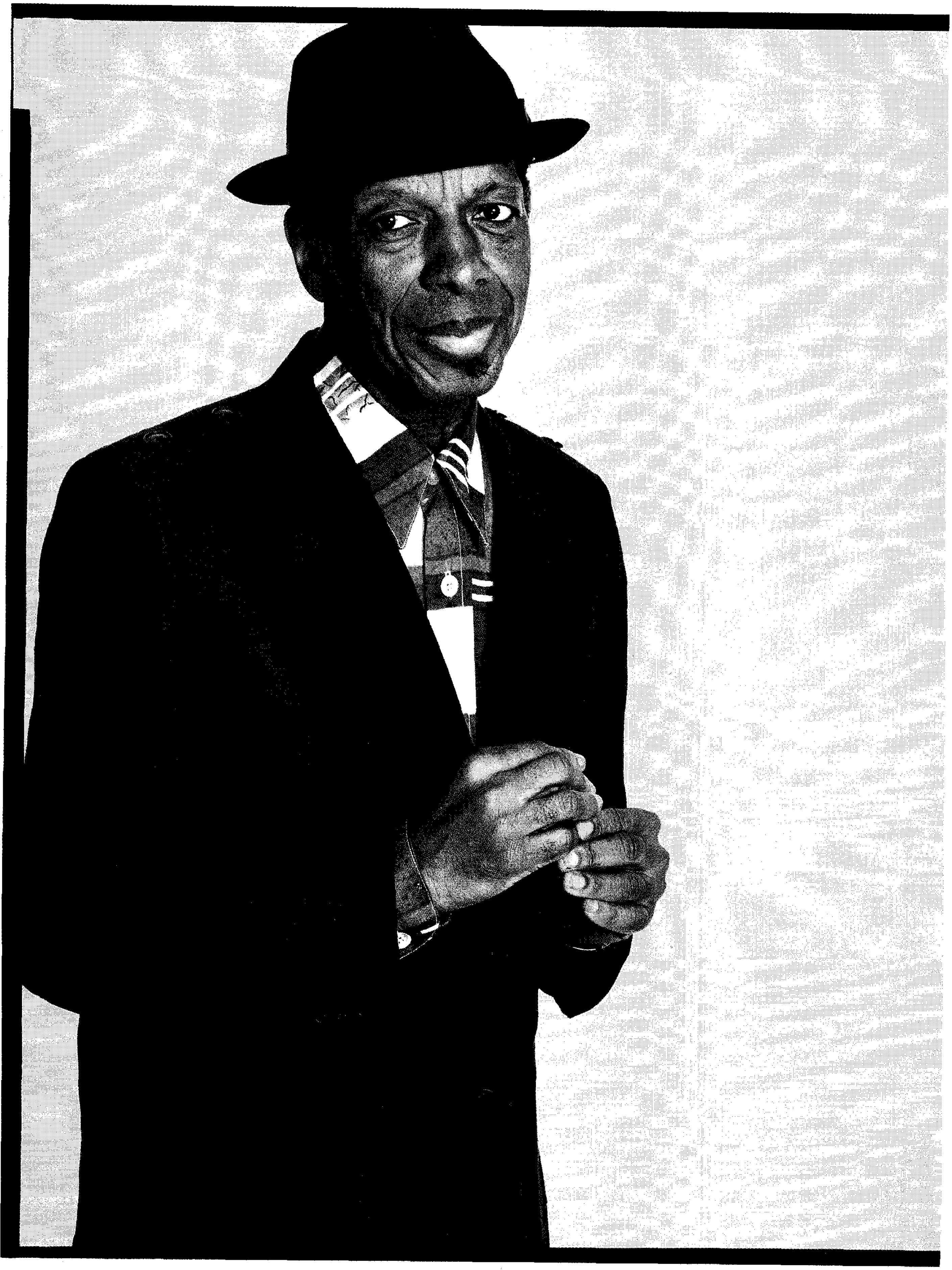
Which is to say he never stopped being a reporter. He filed his daily jottings in folders, presumably because he felt they were relevant to something—an article, a memoir—that he would someday publish. He showed up for work at his *New Yorker* office—not every single day, but regularly—and his neighbors often heard the sound of a typewriter from behind his closed door. Visitors noticed that the desk top and other surfaces were uncluttered; if he was accumulating a fat manuscript, he kept it hidden. This endured for more than thirty years.

None of us—revering Mitchell and flattering ourselves in thinking of him as a "colleague"—knew what to make of it. Calvin Trillin recalls that a particularly bold and insouciant receptionist once asked Mitchell why he'd stopped writing and he solicitously replied, "Well, they said that those people I wrote about were crazy. And they might have been. But they weren't dangerous-crazy, like the people who get written about now." I'm willing to believe this anecdote up to a point, but who's to say that he in fact stopped writing? Propriety inclined the rest of us to reciprocate Mitchell's silence by avoiding the topic. Did his silence possess an eloquent majesty? Or did we fear that it could happen to any of us, like being struck with a piece of falling masonry? Anyway, there were so many other things to talk about with Joe Mitchell, who easily became animated and who stammered with a marvellous coherence, editing each sentence as he uttered it, so that it never quite got completed before the next interesting thought tumbled from his brain. Was his diction a manifestation of some transaction that occurred—or stopped occurring—when he confronted a blank page? Was he constantly writing and rewriting in his mind but nowhere else?

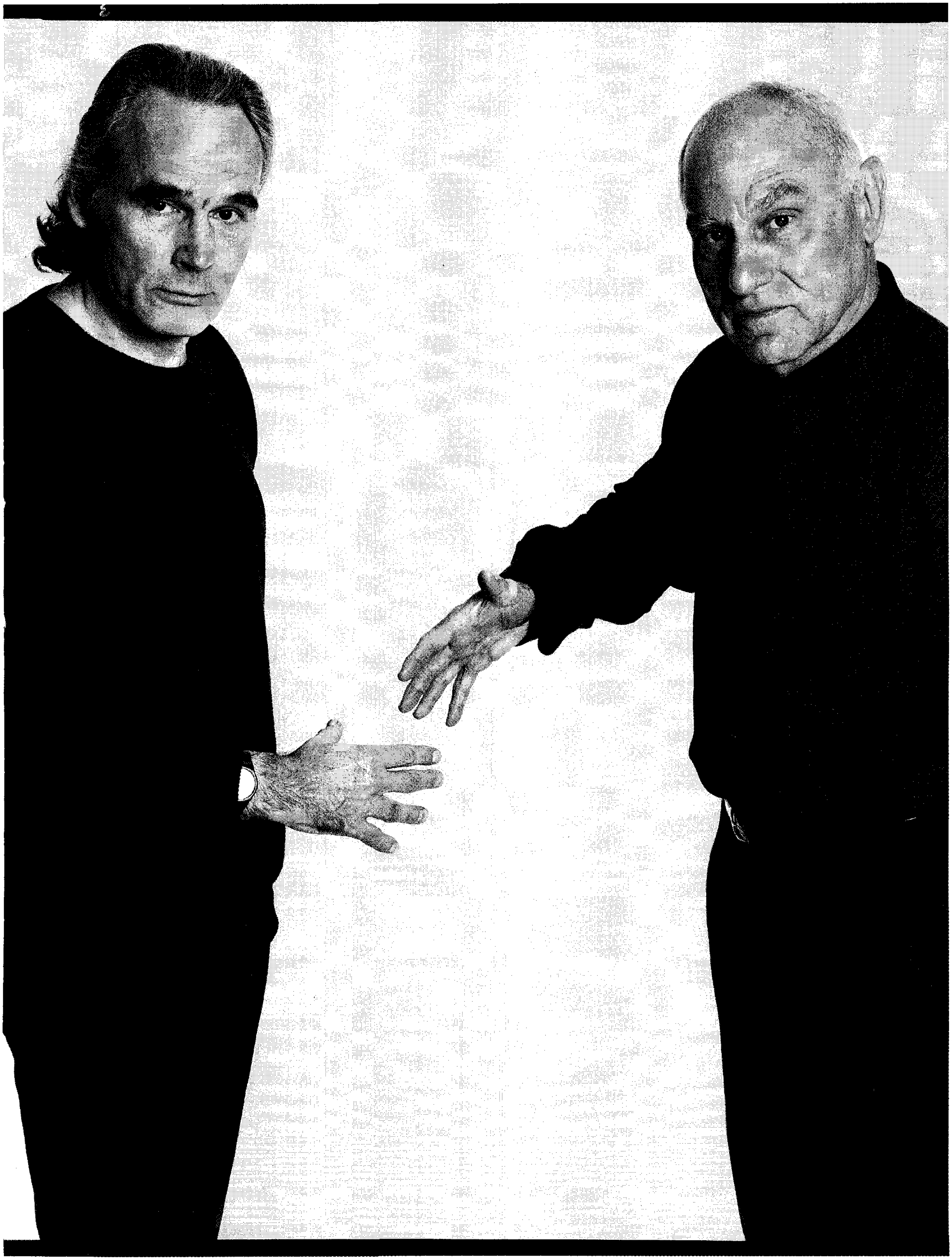
FOR decades, though his books had gone out of print and were selling at steep premiums in secondhand bookstores, Mitchell resisted urgings from readers and publishers to reissue them. He wasn't much impressed by a revival of interest, during the seventies and eighties, in his soul mate A. J. Liebling—in their prime at *The New Yorker*, Mitchell's only true peer as both a reporter and a stylist. Several Liebling titles, including a two-volume compendium, came out in paperback, but Mitchell felt that paperbacks were ephemeral. A Mitchell omnibus, if he were to allow one, would have to be in hardcover. With a diffident vagueness, he also explained that he was working on "something else"—a major new piece of writing, it seemed—that he would want to include.

In the mid-eighties, Dan Frank, then an editor at Viking, which was the original publisher of "Joe Gould's Secret," began gently and patiently wooing him. Frank moved to Pantheon in early 1991, and soon thereafter Mitchell agreed to the publication of "Up in the Old Hotel," a single volume that comprised "McSorley's," "Old Mr. Flood," "The Bottom of the Harbor," and "Joe Gould's Secret," plus seven previously uncollected stories from the thirties, forties, and fifties. What ever became of the new piece of writing that Mitchell had alluded to, Frank never laid eyes on it. With typical meticulousness, Mitchell made microsurgical changes in his old pieces. One day, Sheila McGrath, a former *New Yorker* office manager who was Mitchell's companion during his final decade, asked him what he was up to as he scrutinized one of his stories. A semicolon had found its way into the published version, and he changed it back to a comma, as it had been in his original manuscript. "Don't worry, honey," he explained. "I'm just taking out the improvements." McGrath helped him proofread galleys and provided general logistical assistance and encouragement, and he dedicated the book to her. When "Up in the Old Hotel" was published, in the summer of 1992, it became a unanimous critical success and, at eighty-four, Mitchell had his first best-seller—three weeks on the *Times* hardcover nonfiction list. It still sells about seven thousand copies a year in a not so ephemeral Vintage paperback.

"Up in the Old Hotel" enabled a new generation of readers to discover Mitchell—acolytes of the sort who turned the now departed Books & Co., on upper Madison Avenue, into a



ORNETTE COLEMAN, *jazz musician, New York City, January 27, 1999.*



BRICE MARDEN AND RICHARD SERRA, *painter and sculptor, New York City, January 26, 1999.*

highbrow mosh pit, spilling out of the front door and onto the street, when, three months before his death, he gave a reading to mark the Modern Library's publication of "Joe Gould's Secret." (A Modern Library edition of "The Bottom of the Harbor" had come out in 1994.) It was inevitable that Hollywood—best possible scenario: the Hollywood that actually reads books—would come knocking. This indeed happened while Mitchell was still alive. Because it's a byzantine show-biz story, I will skip the details, other than to say that its scariest moment occurred when "Joe Gould's Secret" was pursued by Tom Cruise's production company.

Instead, shooting begins next month on a movie version of "Joe Gould's Secret" which will be directed by Stanley Tucci and will feature Tucci as Mitchell, Ian Holm as Gould, Hope Davis as Therese Mitchell, Isabella Rossellini as an art-gallery owner who befriended Gould, and Glenn Close as the artist Alice Neel, whose drawings and paintings of Gould included a nude portrait in which he was equipped with more than the usual allotment of male genitalia. ("Anatomically, the painting was fanciful and grotesque but not particularly shocking," Mitchell wrote. "Except for the plethora of sexual organs, it was a strict and sober study of an undernourished middle-aged man.")

Tucci—judging from his two previous directorial efforts, the elegantly wistful comedies "Big Night" and "The Impostors"—seems poised to eclipse Woody Allen as the filmmaker with the most unabashedly indulgent romantic attachment to the New York cityscape. He plans to shoot in about forty locations around town, and the result will be, he hopes, "a celebration of New York in a lot of ways." One day recently, when I joined him during a location-scouting expedition in Manhattan and Queens, we started out at the Minetta Tavern, near Washington Square, where caricatures of Gould have been hanging on the walls for more than fifty years. After "Professor Sea Gull" was published, Gould enjoyed a temporary surge of not quite respectability, perhaps, but acceptability, and he secured a position as the Minetta Tavern's "house bohemian." Mitchell used to track him down there to forward letters, some of which included cash contributions to the "Joe Gould Fund," that had been sent care of *The New Yorker*. Gould's job was to occupy a booth in the restaurant's front room and attract tourists, and in exchange he was entitled to a nightly plate of spaghetti and whatever free drinks he could cadge. As Tucci conferred with his production designer about possible camera placements, he glimpsed through the MacDougal Street window a spooky sight, one that gave us all pause: a wild-haired, gray-bearded passerby, a specimen of old Greenwich Village fauna capable of causing a busload of out-of-towners to gawk. The phrase "Joe Gould's ghost" crossed my mind.

The screenplay for "Joe Gould's Secret," which was originally adapted by Howard A. Rodman, has been revised by Tucci. As the script now reads, before the credits roll at the end of the movie a black screen will appear with white letters saying:

> JOE GOULD DIED IN 1957.
>
> JOSEPH MITCHELL PUBLISHED "JOE GOULD'S SECRET" IN 1964.
>
> FOR THE NEXT THIRTY-TWO YEARS OF HIS LIFE HE CAME TO HIS OFFICE EVERY DAY . . .
>
> . . . AND NEVER PUBLISHED ANOTHER WRITTEN WORD.

An evocative and "literary" coda, I suppose—but, to be punctilious, a not precisely accurate statement. By my count, Mitchell published close to two thousand words from 1992 to 1996—the five-page prefatory "Author's Note" in "Up in the Old Hotel" and, as Dan Frank pointed out to me, the flap copy for that book's dust jacket and the biographical notes and dust-jacket copy for the Modern Library reprints.

I've already mentioned Mitchell's scribbled notes to himself, the equivalent of journal entries. Other unpublished material exists, in a variety of forms. During the eighties, when his siblings and in-laws began dying off, he wrote epitaphs for their gravestones. After his own death, the writer Marie Winn, who had become a close friend during Mitchell's first years as a widower, received from his daughters a file folder that contained drafts, filigreed with corrections, of the many postcards and letters he had sent her. Winn also showed me her copy of "The Bottom of the Harbor," which bore an inscription from Mitchell that ran to four pages—filling the blanks in the front and back of the book—a single sentence, a syntactic high-wire walk, a flow of blue ink with a mesmerizing rhythm reminiscent of Molly Bloom's soliloquy. How many drafts must he have gone through to get to that?

Both Winn and McGrath say that Mitchell showed them pages from a number of works in progress. Winn believes that some of the material she read was "of a piece" with autobiographical passages that found their way into the "Up in the Old Hotel" preface. McGrath, who is the literary executor of Mitchell's estate, sat in my office one day not long ago and spoke coyly of "a shopping bag with various sections of stories." With Mitchell's consent, she said, she began transcribing these texts and storing them on a computer disk. "And that's where they are," she said. "I haven't been able to look at them since he died, so I couldn't say they're publishable as they stand, or with a little minor editing . . ." She never completed this sentence.

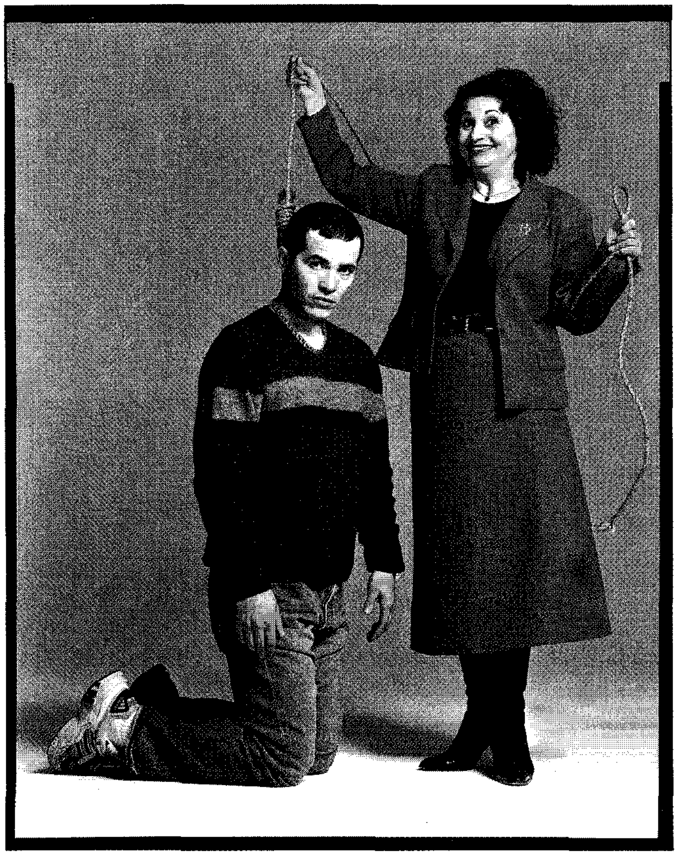
MITCHELL had no trouble finding ways to occupy himself which didn't involve sitting in front of a typewriter. For thirty years, he attended meetings of the James Joyce Society, at the Gotham Book Mart. He was also a board member of the Gypsy Lore Society and helped found the South Street Seaport Museum. A backcountry Baptist who in New York embraced Episcopalianism and modernism, he became a vestryman of Grace Church. (Mitchell's stories provide ample evidence that he strongly believed in Hell; Heaven seems a more problematic and remote prospect.) During the eighties, he spent five years as a commissioner of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. This public service enabled him, in an official capacity, to do something to keep at bay the dark forces he lumped under the general heading "goddam sonsofbitches"—bill collectors with stupid computers, smug politicians and plutocrats, designers and promoters of noisy or ugly machines and buildings. He walked all over the city, often with binoculars, admiring architecture—he was a charter member of the Friends of Cast-Iron Architecture—and he lavished special attention upon ruins. When he came across an old building in the early stages of demolition, he would wander inside—a natty gent in a well-pressed business suit, usually carrying a shopping bag—and drag out whatever he could carry that looked interesting: bricks, shards of marble cornices, elevator pulleys.

"My father would collect entire skyscrapers and stick them under the bed," Nora Mitchell Sanborn told me when I paid her a visit not long ago. Now widowed, she lives in central New Jersey, in a house brimming with her father's odd treasures—glass bottlenecks, New York hotel spoons, brass hinges. Two of Mitchell's siblings and a sister-in-law died within three months of him, she said, "and my sister and I noticed that our cousins ended up dividing diamonds and stock certificates, and we wondered how we had ended up dividing doorknobs and drawer pulls."

At one point, she led me to an upstairs room where she kept boxes filled with old jam and marmalade jars that now contained objects her father had picked up or dug up as he walked the family fields in North Carolina. For an hour, I opened jars and tried to puzzle out what I was looking at: arrowheads, pottery fragments, quartzes, flints, pieces of rusty hardware. Inside each was a dated scrap of paper, in Mitchell's scrawl, a hybrid prose-poem catalogue of the contents: "The large broken projectile point was found in a rut in a gully in the road between our house and Miss Dinabel's that had been filled with sand from a pit somewhere near Adam Davis's. I found the purple bottle throat on the site of the Cephus blue house at the Butler place between the road and the ditch—at the edge of the soybeans." As I sifted through these relics—bits of the past that Mitchell had sifted from the soil of his birthplace, a past that gave him far more comfort than the present—I understood that an ordinary object, held up to the light in a certain way, could possess for Mitchell the same fascination as a Gypsy king, a bearded lady, or a street preacher with a "frantic voice." When Mitchell wrote, he made the exotic seem companionable and the everyday seem strange. As long as he stayed attached to these relics, it meant that he hadn't stopped trying.

No doubt Mitchell was aware that, among other writers, his failure to publish incited speculations about what he was up to, including the speculation that he wasn't up to anything. Mitchell himself was probably the source of the hypothesis that quitting smoking, when he turned fifty—almost four decades before cancer caught up with him—made it more difficult to concentrate. Another theory I've come across—one I don't give much credence to—is that the death of Liebling, in 1963, deprived him of his ideal reader. (When I ran this by the writer and editor William Maxwell, he smiled and said, "If I had an ideal reader who died, I'd go and find another ideal reader." My own guess is that Mitchell, in his bones, knew that he was his own ideal reader.) Despite the reticence on this general topic which prevailed within the precincts of *The New Yorker*, it seems that when thoughtful inquisitors brought it up, Mitchell, with his characteristic courtliness, tried to accommodate. Reviewing "Up in the Old Hotel" in *The American Scholar*, William Zinsser—who, as it happens, introduced me to Mitchell's work when he taught an undergraduate writing seminar at Yale, during the seventies—postulated a fatal combination of Gould's endless monologues and excessive neediness and Mitchell's excessive forbearance: "Gould just plumb wore Mitchell out." In reply, Mitchell inscribed a copy of "The Bottom of the Harbor," thanking Zinsser "for your deeply understanding review of 'Up in the Old Hotel.' "

I think Zinsser is half right: Mitchell's experience with Gould deromanticized the reporter's life, at least the part that involved sitting up until four in the morning in a smoky bar listening to the prattle of a long-winded dipsomaniac. But there were other stories, conducive



JOHN LEGUIZAMO, *actor and standup comedian, with his mother, Luz Leguizamo, New York City, January 13, 1999.*

to more leisurely approaches, that Mitchell wanted to write, and evidently tried to write, before, for reasons known only to him, he abandoned them. He contemplated writing about his family (but decided he couldn't proceed while certain people were still alive); a sequel to "Mr. Hunter's Grave" (same inhibition); a memoir centered upon Ann Honeycutt, a fellow Southern exile, whom he'd befriended during their early years in New York; another piece about the McSorley family (which would have given him a convenient excuse to spend time in Ireland, where he was happy to breathe the air on even the dreariest of days).

The pivotal passage in "Joe Gould's Secret" occurs when Mitchell, thoroughly exasperated, confronts Gould with his knowledge that the "Oral History" is a phantasm. "It exists in your mind, I guess," he says angrily. "But you've always been too lazy to write it down." Gould replies so softly that Mitchell can't quite make it out: "If I heard him right—and I have often wondered if I did hear him right—he said, 'It's not a question of laziness.' Then, evidently deciding not to say any more, he turned his back on me again."

After Gould departs, Mitchell is immediately filled with remorse: "I have always deeply disliked seeing anyone shown up or found out or caught in a lie or caught red-handed doing anything, and now, with time to think things over, I began to feel ashamed of myself for the way I had lost my temper and pounced on Gould." After musing about how he thinks Gould got himself into this fix, he writes of the "Oral History," "The oral part of it might not exactly be down on paper, but he had it all in his head, and any day now he was going to start getting it down."

When Robert Gottlieb was the editor of *The New Yorker*, from 1987 to 1992, every so often he would drop by Mitchell's office and they would have, as Gottlieb recalls, "a very pleasant chat about the progress he was making." Mitchell never mentioned the specifics of what he was writing about and Gottlieb didn't press him to deliver. "He'd say, 'Oh, I hope to be able to show you something within the year.' I liked him, liked his work, and I wanted to be respectful without being demanding. I just showed, I hoped, a continuing affectionate interest without being exigent. It quickly became apparent to me that we were going through some ritual."

Tina Brown, who was the editor during the last four years of Mitchell's life, tried a rather different approach: "When there was a big fire at the Fulton Fish Market, I called and asked him to do a piece. He said he'd try. The subtext of the conversation was he wished he could but he no longer could. He was a newsman who had a certain energy level and, left to his own devices, became more and more trapped by his own myth."

On the dust-jacket flap of "Joe Gould's Secret," Mitchell, writing in the third person, quotes himself: "When I found out Gould's secret . . . I was appalled, but I soon regained my respect for him, and through the years my respect has grown, though I must confess that he is still an enigma to me. Nowadays, in fact, when his name comes into my mind, it is followed instantly by another name—the name of Bartleby the Scrivener—and then I invariably recall Bartleby's haunting, horrifyingly self-sufficient remark 'I would prefer not to.' "

This allusion to Melville's antihero suggests that what bedevilled Mitchell wasn't an excess of craftsmanship—the perfectionist writing himself into a corner—but an existential unease. Instead of "I would prefer not to," Mitchell routinely demurred, "It does not speak to my condition."

Still, I think—because he knew as well as anyone the stoic beauty and mystique of the thing left unsaid—Mitchell deliberately and misleadingly overplayed the parallel between Gould and himself. It was all right to toy with the paradox that he was some sort of Joe Gould manqué—to see, in effect, if he could make his shadow dance. But Mitchell was, in the end, a wise, proud, fastidious Carolina gentleman who regularly used to vacuum the rows and stacks of thousands of books that filled his apartment. And Gould was a flea-bitten, lice-ridden, rheumy-eyed, toothless, intermittently diverting flophouse denizen whose native Yankee pride had been subverted by deep psychological wounds that never healed. What they had in common, above all, was a fascination with the way people presented themselves when they talked about what most mattered to them. For most of his life, only Mitchell got it down on paper.

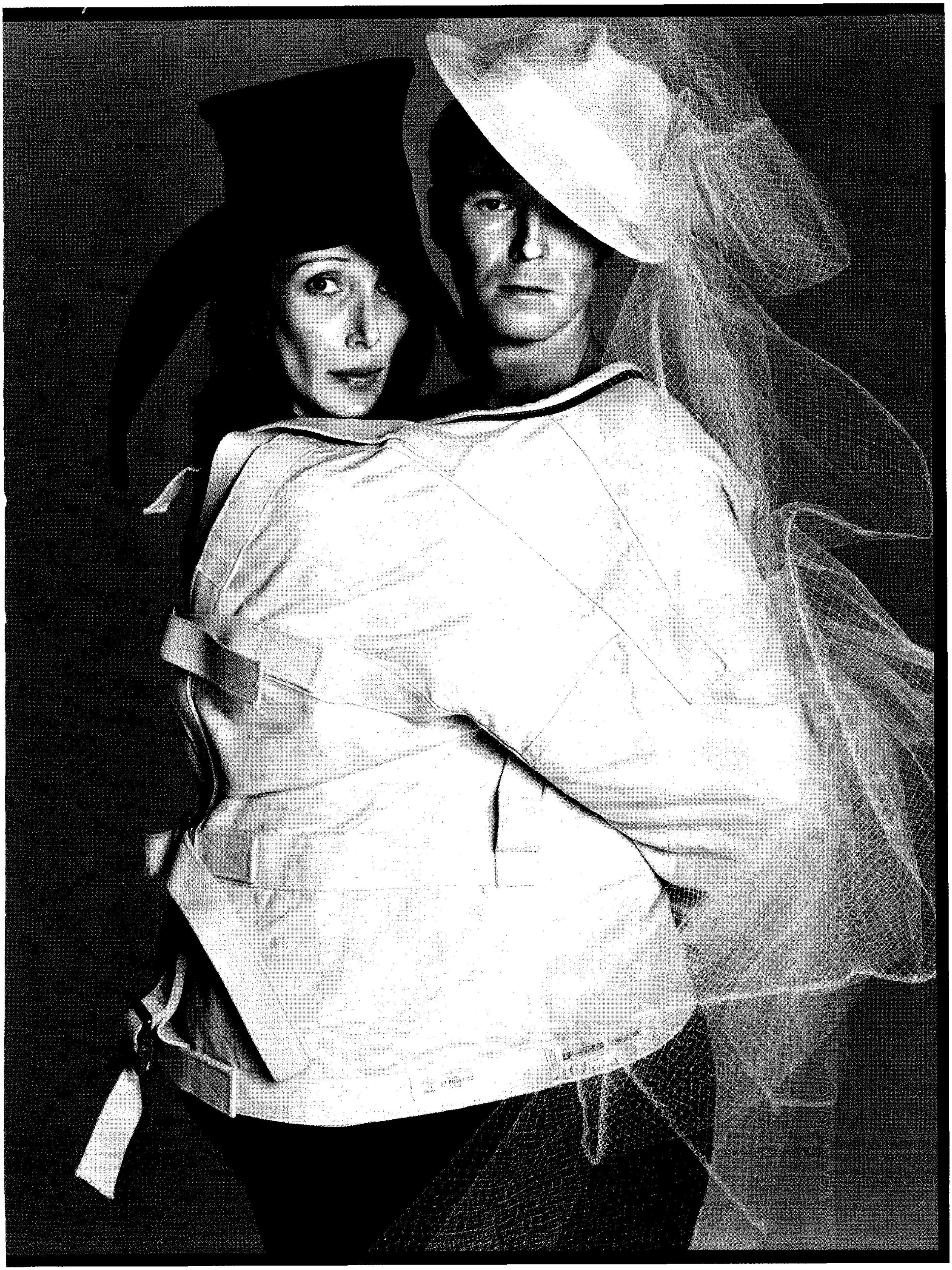
Philip Hamburger, who was a *New Yorker* contemporary and a devoted friend of Mitchell's, told me recently that, in his estimation, questions about Mitchell's long silence struck him as not merely gauche but also "prurient."

"I equate them with questions about the President's sex life," he said. "Joe and I had lunch together regularly for sixty years. During that entire period, I can swear he never once asked me what I was doing and I never asked him what he was doing. All these people are asking a sort of tabloid question: Why didn't he write more? I've always felt it was a completely unnecessary question. If Joe had died at seventy, nobody would have raised it. Why didn't he write more? Well, he wrote enough."

On his deathbed, Mitchell said, "There was so much I still wanted to do." Of course he wrote enough. Except that certain varieties of greed aren't really sinful—they're an expression of sensual appetite. Rereading him, we couldn't help ourselves. Like Joe Mitchell himself, thinking about heading home one last time, we wanted more. ♦

TIES THAT BIND

Camilla Nickerson and Neville Wakefield first dated when they were teenagers in London, but, Nickerson says, they "never made it to the bed." Ten years later, they met again, when both were working on a video shoot for a now forgotten pop band. This time, they made it to the altar, after moving to New York, in 1993. Nickerson, a fashion editor, is best known for her work in Vogue, and Wakefield is a writer and art curator, whose most recent show, which featured the photography of Martin Kippenberger and Richard Prince, was called "Psychoarchitecture: The Fucked-Up Nature of Things." In 1996, the pair collaborated on "Fashion," a book of photographs, which Wakefield describes as "an attempt to define the moment at which fashion photography started to seem bad for the health."



A CRITIC AT LARGE

THE SYNTHETIC SUBLIME

How can a constantly changing city stay the same?

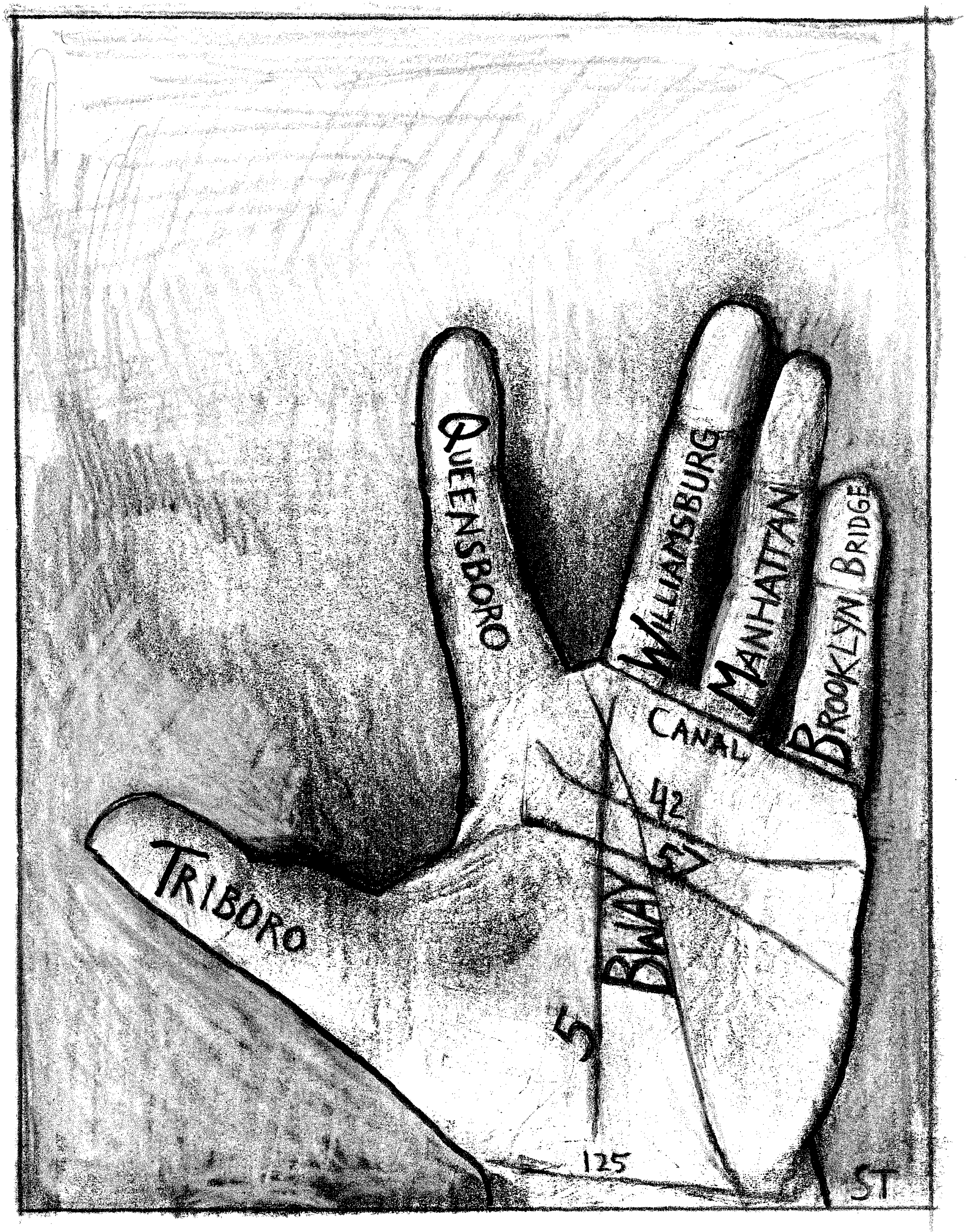
BY CYNTHIA OZICK

MORE than any other metropolis of the Western world, New York disappears. It disappears and then it disappears again; or say that it metamorphoses between disappearances, so that every seventy-five years or so another city bursts out, as if against nature—new shapes, new pursuits, new immigrants with their unfamiliar tongues and worried uneasy bustle. In nature, the daffodil blooms, withers, vanishes, and in the spring returns—always a daffodil, always indistinguishable from its precursor. Not so New York, preternatural New York! Go to Twenty-third Street and Eighth Avenue: where is the Grand Opera House, with its statuary and carvings, its awnings and Roman-style cornices? Or reconnoitre Thirteenth Street and Broadway: who can find Wallack's Theatre, where the acclaimed Mrs. Jennings, Miss Plessy Mordaunt, and Mr. J. H. Stoddart once starred, and where, it was said, "even a mean play will be a success"? A hundred years ago, no one imagined the dissolution of these dazzling landmarks; they seemed as inevitable, and as permanent, as our Lincoln Center, with its opera and concerts and plays, and its lively streaming crowds.

Yet catapult us forward another hundred years, and (though we won't recognize the place) it is certain to be, uninterruptedly, New York, populous, evolving, faithfully inconstant, magnetic, manmade, unnatural—the synthetic sublime. If you walk along Lexington Avenue, say, it isn't easy to be reminded that Manhattan is an island, or even that it lies, like everything else, under an infinitude of sky. New York's sky is jigsawed, cut into geometric pieces glimpsed between towers or caught slantwise across a granite-and-glass ravine. There is no horizon; the lucky penthouses and fifteenth-floor apartments and offices may have long views, but the streets have almost none. At night, the white glow that fizzes upward from the city—an inverted electric Niagara—obscures the stars, and except for the Planetarium's windowless mimicry New York is oblivious of the cosmos. It is nearly as indifferent, by and large, to its marine surround. Walt Whitman once sang of the "tall masts of Mannahatta" and of the "crested and scallop-edg'd waves," but the Staten Island ferry and the Circle Line beat on mastless, and the drumming ribbon of the West Side Highway bars us from the sound and smell of waters rushing or lapping. New York pretends that it is inland and keeps dry indoors and feels shoreless; New York water means faucets and hidden pipes and, now and then, a ceiling leak or the crisis of a burst main. Almost in spite of itself, Riverside Drive looks out on the Hudson and can, if it likes, remember water. On Manhattan's other flank, the F.D.R. Drive swims alongside the East River like a heavy-chuffing landlubber crocodile, unmindful of the moving water nearby. New York domesticates whatever smacks of sea. And when the two rivers, the Hudson and the East, converge and swallow each other at the Battery's feet, it is the bays alone, the Upper and the Lower, that hurry out to meet the true deep. New York turns its back on the Atlantic. The power and the roar New York looks to are its own.

The Russian poet Joseph Brodsky—born in Leningrad, exiled to New York, buried in Venice—used to say that he wrote to please his predecessors, not his contemporaries. Often enough, New York works toward the opposite: it means to impress the here-and-now, which it autographs with an insouciant wrecking ball. For New Yorkers, a millennium's worth of difference can be encompassed in six months. Downtown lofts on spooky dark blocks that once creaked under the weight and thunder and grime of industrial machinery are suddenly filled with sofas upholstered in white linen and oak bars on wheels and paintings under track lighting and polyurethaned coffee tables heaped with European magazines. Bryant Park, notorious shady hangout, blossoms into a cherished noonday amenity. Or else the deserted tenements along the Metro-North line, staring out eyeless and shamefaced at the commuters' train down from Stamford, will, overnight, have had their burned-out hollows covered over with painted plywood—trompe-l'oeil windows and flowerpots pretending, Potemkin-like, and by municipal decree, that human habitation has resumed.

Despite New York's sleight-of-hand transmutations and fool-the-eye pranks, the lady isn't really sawed in half: she leaps up, alive and smiling. If physical excision is the city's ongoing principle, there are, anyhow, certain surprising tenacities and keepsake intuitions. Wait, for instance, for the downtown No. 104 at the bus stop on Broadway at Seventy-second Street, look across the way, and be amazed—what Renaissance palazzo is this? A tall façade with draped female sculptures on either side, arched cornices, patterned polychrome bricks: ornamental flourish vying with ornamental flourish. And then gaze down the road to your right: one vast slab after another, the uncompromising severity of straight lines, brilliantly winking windows climbing and climbing, not a curve or entablature or parapet or embrasure ruffling the sleek skin of these new residential monoliths. In sharp winter light, a dazzling juxtaposition, filigreed cheek by modernist jowl. The paradox of New York is that its disappearances contain constancies—and not only because some buildings from an earlier generation survive to prod us toward historical self-consciousness. What is most steadfast in New York has the fleet look of the mercurial: the city's persistent daring, vivacity, enchantment, experiment; the marvel of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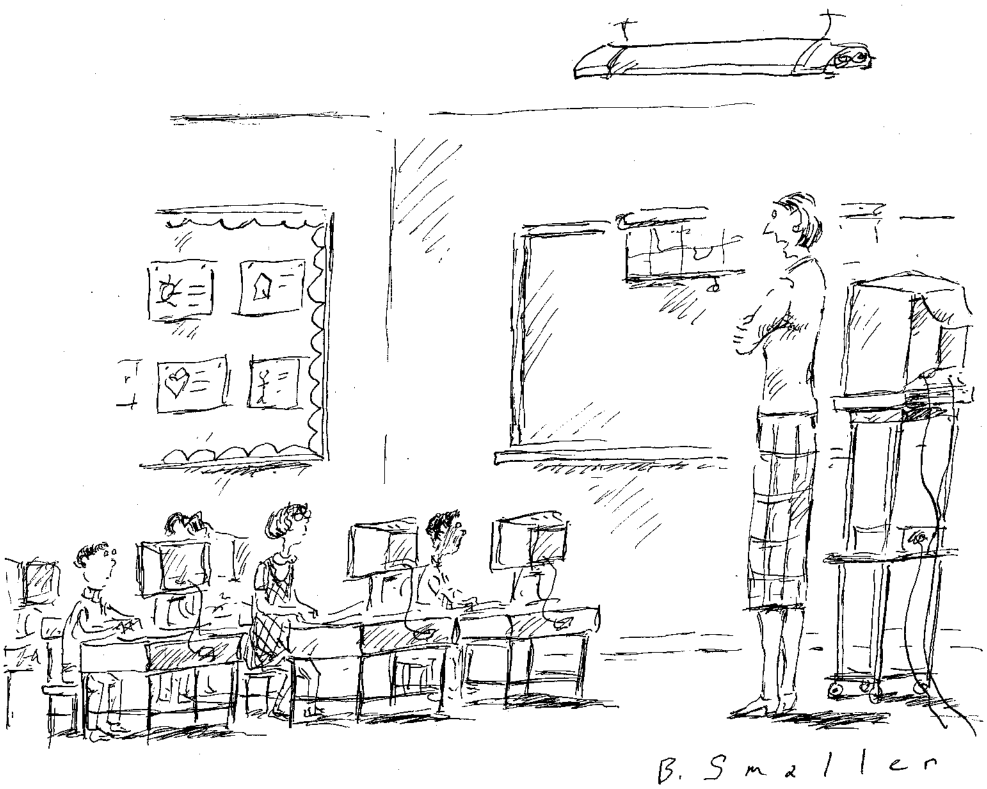


"Keep your eyes on your own screen."

• •

new forms fired by old passions, the rekindling of the snuffed.

The Lower East Side, those tenement-and-pushcart streets of a century ago, once the venue of synagogues and sukkahs and religious-goods stores and a painful density of population, and later the habitat of creeps and druggies, is now the neighborhood of choice for the great-grandchildren of earlier tenants who were only too happy to escape to the Bronx. At the nearby Knitting Factory and in other clubs, you may catch up with Motel Girl, a band specializing in "Las Vegas stripper noir"—avant-garde jazz described as jarring, flashy, seedy, sexy, Movietone-violent, dark. Many of the singers and musicians live in the old tenement flats (toilet down the hall) on Avenue B, with rents as high as a thousand dollars. Broadway and Prince, where Dean & Deluca boasts three hundred varieties of cheese, was home to a notions shop two generations ago; not far away, on Orchard Street, the Tenement Museum stands as an emblem of nostalgic consecration, ignored by its trendy neighbors. You can still buy pickles out of the barrel at Guss's, but the cutting-edge young who come down to Ludlow and Stanton for the music or the glitz rarely find those legendary greenhorn warrens of much historic interest; their turf is the East Village. The Lower East Side's current inhabitants, despite their fascination with the louche, are educated and middle-class, with mothers back on Long Island wishing their guitar-playing daughters had gone to medical school. What these seekers on A, B, and C are after—like their aunts and uncles gyrating in the talismanic Rainbow Room, or like Scott and Zelda plunging into fountains to jump-start the Jazz Age—is New York's insuperable constant: the sense of belonging to the glamorous marrow of one's own time.

Uptown's glamour drive is more domestic. On the Upper West Side, the great style emporia dominate, behemoths of food, cooking devices, leather accessories, "natural" cosmetics, no-color cotton sheets, Mission furniture. Zabar's, the Fairway, Barney Greengrass, Citarella, H & H Bagels—dizzyingly flooded with epicurean getters and spenders—harbor prodigalities of dimpled breads, gourmet coffees, the right kind of polenta, the right kind of rice and salsa, the right kind of coffeemaker. Across town, the Upper East Side seems, in contrast, staid, reserved, nearly quiet. The streets are less peopled. The wind is colder. A hauteur lurks in the limestone. If the West Side is a roiling marketplace, the East Side is a marble lobby presided over by a monarchical doorman. Fifth Avenue can be tacky here and there, but Madison, with its rows of élite European designers, grows more and more burnished, New York's version of the Rue du Faubourg-Saint-Honoré. On Park and Madison, affluence reigns and, with it, a certain neighborhood serenity—a privacy, a regal intimacy. (Over on Lexington and Third, the city's rush begins again.)

Posh East and extravagant West dislike each other, with the ingrained antipathy of restraint and profusion, calm and bustle; nor are they likely, except for an audacious handful of crosstown adventurers, to rub elbows in the shops. A silent cold war chills Manhattan. Its weapons are Zabar's in the West, Versace in the East. There is no hot line between them.

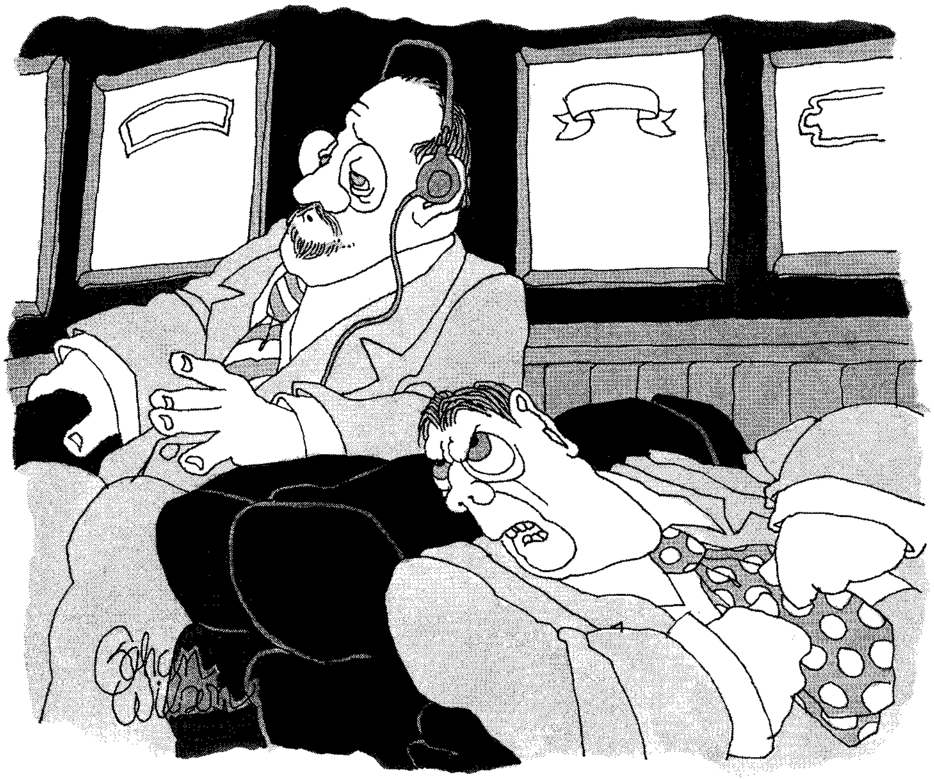
WHO lives in New York? E. B. White, mulling the question fifty years ago, imagined "a farmer arriving from Italy to set up a small grocery store in a slum, or a young girl arriving from a small town in Mississippi to escape the indignity of being observed by her neighbors, or a boy arriving from the Corn Belt with a manuscript in his suitcase and a pain in his heart." This has a musty if sweetish scent for us now—eau de Jimmy Stewart, perhaps. The circumstances of the arrivals were generally not so benign; neither was their reception. In a 1922 address before the New York-based American Academy of Arts and Letters, Owen Wister, the author of "The Virginian," said of the newcomers, "Recent arrivals pollute the original spring. . . . It would be well for us if many recent arrivals would become departures." He meant the immigrants who were just then inundating Ellis Island; but the children of those immigrants would soon be sorting out the dilemmas of welcome and unwelcome by other means.

I remember a ferocious street game

that was played in the northeast Bronx long ago, in the neighborhood known as Pelham Bay. It was called War, and it was exclusively a girls' game. With a piece of colored chalk you drew a small circle, in which you placed a pink rubber ball. Then you drew a second circle around it, concentric but far larger. This second circle you divided into as many pie slices as there were players. Each player was assigned a pie slice as her designated territory and wrote in it the name of a country she felt to be her own. So it went like this: Peggy Scanlon chose Ireland; Dorothy Wilson, Scotland; Hilda Weber, Germany; Carolyn Johnson, Sweden; Maria Viggiano (whose Sicilian grandmothers yearly wrapped their fig trees in winter canvas), Italy; Allegra Sadacca (of a Sephardic family recently from Turkey, a remnant of the Spanish Jews exiled by Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492), Spain; Madge Taylor (an immigrant from Iowa), America; and I (whose forebears had endured the despots of Russia for nearly a thousand years), Palestine. So much for the local demographics. Immediately after these self-defining allegiances were declared, someone would shriek "War!" and the asphalt mayhem of racing and tackling and tumbling would begin, with the pink rubber globe as prize. I don't suppose little girls anywhere in New York's boroughs nowadays play this disunited-nations game, but, if they do, surely the pie slices are chalked up with preferences for Trinidad, Jamaica, Haiti, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Greece, Lebanon, Albania, Pakistan, India, China, and, of course—for antecedents who were never willing immigrants—Africa. In New York, origins still count, and not always benevolently.

THOUGH proletarian and patrician may inhabit adjoining streets, it is the upper crust that runs the city. This stratum of the social order was once dubbed the Four Hundred, but New York's current patriciate, however it may have multiplied, escapes being counted—though it counts as heavily as ever and remains as conscientiously invisible. Élitism of this kind is rarely political; it almost never becomes mayor. In a democratic ambience, New York's potentates and nabobs have no easy handle; no one names them, not even in tabloid mockery. Then let us call them, collectively, by what they possess: Influence. Influence is financial, corporate, loftily and discreetly legal; Influence is power and planning and money. And money is the armature on which the mammoth superstructure that is New York is sculptured: architecture and philanthropy, art galleries and libraries and foundations, zoos and conservatories and museums, concert halls and universities and houses of worship. The tallest buildings—the Chrysler, the Empire State, the risen polyhedrons of Rockefeller Center, the Twin Towers, assorted old spires—all have their ankles in money. Influence *means* money, whether in the making of it, the spending, or the giving. Influence is usually private and guarded; it may shun celebrity; it needs no public face; its precincts are often reclusive. You are not likely to follow Influence in its daily maneuvers—though you can, all week long, observe the subway riders as they patiently swarm, intent on getting in and getting out and getting there. The jerky cars grind out their wild sawing clamor; locked inside the racket, the passengers display a Buddhist self-forgetfulness. Noiseless Influence, meanwhile, is driven in smoked-glass limousines, hidden, reserved, arcane. If all the rest of the citizenry were carted off, and only Influence were left, the city would be silent. But if Influence were spirited away in some grand and ghostly yacht, a kind of Flying Dutchman, say, the men in their dinner jackets, the women in their gowns, what would happen to New York? The mysterious and mazy coursings of money would dry up. The city would come to a halt.

Old money—New York's old muse—made the palaces; time impaired them. Grand Central Terminal, Cornelius Vanderbilt's embellished paragon of a transport temple, by the nineteen-fifties had declined into a routinely seedy train depot. But what old money brought into being, new money, along with civic determination, refurbishes. New York, the Eraser and the Renewer, with a sweep of its resuscitating will, has cleansed the temple's degradation. The gawky advertising signs are banished and the constellations on the vaulted horizon scrubbed until their stars glitter. The theme is artful mirroring: the existing grand stair engenders an answering grand stair on the opposite end of the great concourse. Grand Central has no fear of the ornamental; it revels in breadth and unstinting scale; it intends to inspire. The idea of the publicly palatial—unashamed lavishness—has returned.



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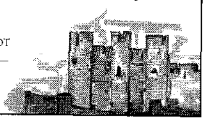

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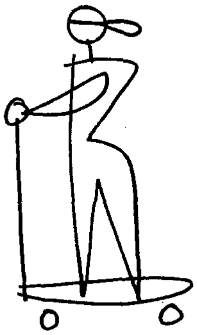
second Street westward to Fifth Avenue and enter the most illustrious temple of all, the lion-sentried Library, where the famed third-floor Reading Room has just undergone its own rebirth—both in homage to and in dissent from the modern. High-tech computers parade across vast polished tables under a gilded rococo ceiling, a Beaux-Arts confection frosted with floral arabesques. Whatever the mavens may say, and however the critics may scowl, New York (in at least one of its multiple manifestations) thirsts for intimations of what the Victorians did not hesitate to invoke: Noble Beauty. New York has learned to value—though never to venerate—its old robber-baron muses, not for their pre-income-tax devourings but for their appetite for the baronial: the Frick Collection, the Morgan Library, the Cooper-Hewitt (housed in Andrew Carnegie's sixty-four-room mansion). The vanished Pennsylvania Station, the original—razed a generation ago as an elaborate eyesore, now regretted, its bargain-basement replacement a daily discouragement—will soon rise again, in the nearby body of the superannuated General Post Office (Roman, kingly, columned). Fancy, then, a soaring apparition of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, that prototype of urban palace, and of its philosophical rival, the Museum of Modern Art, hovering over the city, scanning it for symptoms of majesty—the Met and MOMA, joined by spectral flights of the City Ballet, the serious little theatres, and Carnegie Hall, all whispering, "Aspire, aspire!"

BUT grandeur on this style is a neighborhood of the mind, and a narrow one at that. Real neighborhoods and psychological neighborhoods may, in fact, overlap—literary Greenwich Village being the most storied case in point. Nowadays, Village literariness (Hart Crane, Marianne Moore, and all the rest of the enshrined) hangs as a kind of tattered nimbus not over the old, mostly temporary, residences of the celebrated but over the bars, cellars, and cafés they once frequented. Neighborhoods of the mind, though, are rarely so solidly placed in a single site. Of actual neighborhoods (or "sections," in moribund New Yorkese)—SoHo, Tribeca, Chinatown, Little Italy, Chelsea, Gramercy Park, Harlem, Murray Hill, South Street Seaport—only a few are as determinedly self-defined as the Village. But a denizen of any of them can venture out to a collectivity of taste and imagination and familiarity unconstrained by geography. Jazz and blues and night-life aficionados, movie buffs, gays, rap artists, boxing and wrestling zealots, singles, esoteric-restaurant habitués, Central Park joggers, marathon runners, museum addicts, lovers of music or theatre or dance, lonelyhearts, shoppers, hotel weekenders, barflies, churchgoers, Talmud enthusiasts, Bronx-born Tibetan Buddhists, students of Sufism, kabbalists, theosophists, voice or ski coaches, S.A.T. and L.S.A.T. crammers, amateur painters, union members, members of boards and trustees, Internet devotees, fans of the Yankees or the Mets or the Jets or the Knicks, believers in psychics and tea-leaf readers, streetwalkers and their pimps, antiques fanciers, art collectors, philanthropists, professors of linguistics, lexicographers, copy editors, librarians, kindergarten teachers, crossing guards, wine votaries, storefront chiropractors, Chinese or Hebrew or Arabic calligraphers—all these, and inconceivably more, can emerge from any locality to live, if only for a few hours, in a sympathetic neighborhood of affinity. Expertise and idiosyncrasy and bursting desire burn and burn in New York: a conflagration of manifold, insatiable, tumultuous will.

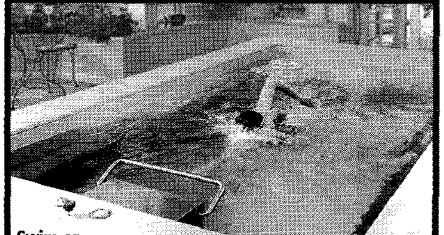
I was born in a brownstone on East Eighty-eighth Street, between First and York Avenues—but both the latter avenue and the area have since altered their designations and their character. York was once Avenue A, and the neighborhood, populated largely by German immigrants, was called Yorkville. It was here before my birth that my infant brother was kidnapped by a madwoman. The story as it was told to me is set in a certain year but not in any special weather; it seems to me that it must have been summer. I see my mother, hot, sleeveless, breathless, frantic, running through the night streets of Yorkville to find the kidnapper and snatch her baby back. He had been sleeping in his wicker carriage in a nook among rows of brown bottles and drawers filled with maple-flavored rock candy on strings, not four yards from where my young father, in his pharmacist's jacket, a fountain pen always in its pocket, stood tending to his mortar and pestle, working up a medicinal paste. Into my parents' drugstore the madwoman flew, seizing baby and carriage and all, and out into the dark she fled, only to be discovered some hours later in nearby Carl Schurz Park, dishevelled and undone by furious infantile howls, and grateful to relinquish the captive screamer.

In my half-dreaming re-creation of this long-ago scene—the stolen child, the fleeing madwoman—why must it be summertime? I think I know why. New York in summer is another sort of city; in mood and weight it has nothing in common with wintry New York. A New York summer is frenetic, syncopated, blistered, frayed, dusty. There is a desperation in its heat, and a sense of letdown, despite relief, in its air-conditioned indoors. Melting squads of tourists, in shorts and open shirts or halters, sweat pooling under their camera straps, their heads swivelling from one gaudy carnival sight to the next, push through Times Square in anxious quick march. Smells of perspiring hot dogs under venders' grease-lined umbrellas mingle with the exhaust fumes of heaving buses. There is nothing relaxed about the summer city. New York's noise is louder, New York's toughness is brasher, New York's velocity is speedier. Everything—stores, offices, schedules, vacations, traffic—demands full steam ahead; no one can say the livin' is easy. New York in July is out of synch, not quite itself, hoping for ransom, kidnapped by midsummer frolicking: picnickers awaiting free twilight performances of Shakespeare in Central Park; street parades of nighttime swelterers along Museum Mile, where tappers and clappers gather before the Jewish Museum to salute the tootling klezmer players; break-dancers down from Harlem, twelve-year-olds effortless and expert and little and lithe, who spin on their heels across from the hive of Madison Square Garden. In the American heartland in summer, babies fall down wells and pipes, and that is news. In New York—fidgety, frittering, frenzied, boiling New York—summer itself is news.



The true city is the winter city. The woolly enchantment of a population swaddled and muffled, women and men in long coats, eccentric boots, winding scarves; steam sculptures forming out of human breath; hushed streets; tiny white electric points on skeletal trees! The icy air like a scratch across a sheet of silver, the smoky chestnut carts, the foggy odor of hot coffee when you open a door, a bakery's sweet mist swirling through its transom, a glimpse of rosy-nosed skaters in the well of the Rockefeller stelae, the rescuing warmth of public lobbies—New York in February is a city of grateful small shocks. And, just as in an antiquated English novel of manners, New York has its "season"—lectures, readings, rallies, dinner parties, chamber music in someone's living room. While in summer you cannot rely on the taxis to turn on their air-conditioning, in winter each yellow capsule is a hot little bullet; the driver in his turban remembers his subcontinental home. There is no dusk like a New York winter dusk: the blurry gray of early evening, when the lone walker, ferried between day and night, jostled by strangers in packs, feels most desolate, and when the privacy of burrowing into a coat collar brings on a nameless loss. At such a moment, the forest of flowering lights (a brilliance suddenly apprehended) makes its cheering claim: that here, right here, is importance, achievement, delight in the work of the world; that here, right here, is the hope of connection, and life in its fulfillment. In a gregarious New York winter, especially in restaurants at eight o'clock, you will hear jokes, stories with amazing climaxes, futures plotted out, jealousies retailed, gossip above all: who's up, who's down, what's in, what's out. Central heating never abolished the theory and practice of the fireside.

WHAT Manhattan talks about, obliquely or openly—what it thinks about, whatever the season—is ambition. Europeans always make much of this: how *hard* New Yorkers work, the long days, the paltry vacations, the single-minded avarice for status, the obsessiveness, the terrible drive. What? No *dolce far niente*? But only an outsider would remark on the city's striving; for New Yorkers it is ingrained, taken for granted, valued. Unlike Bartleby, downtown's most distinctive imag-



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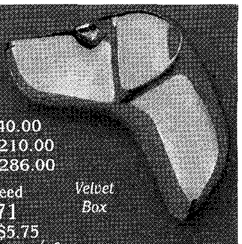

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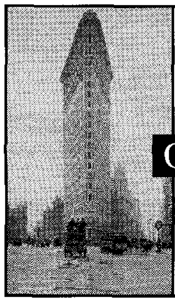

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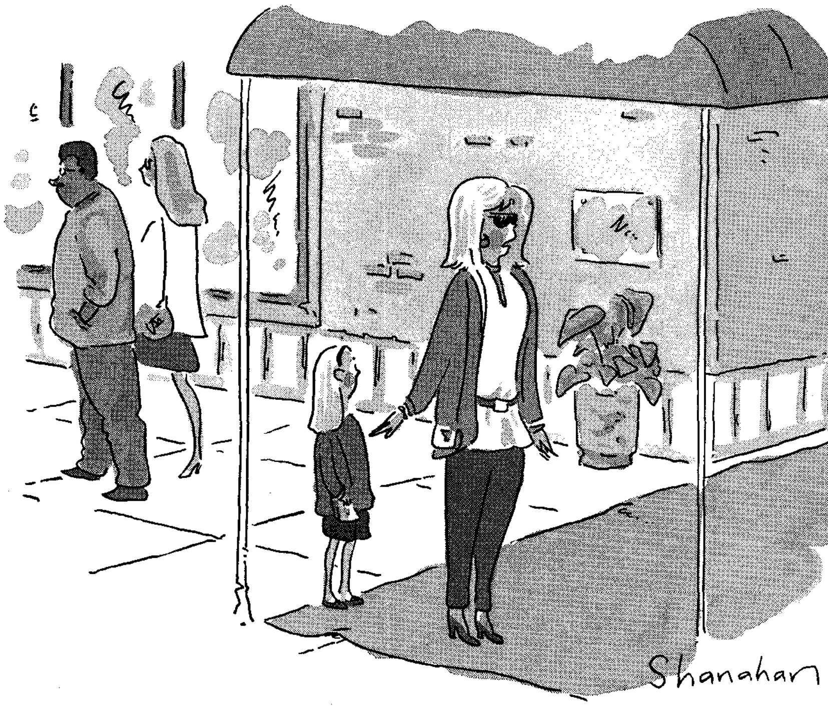
inary inhabitant, New York never prefers not to. New York prefers and prefers and prefers—it prefers power and scope to tranquillity and intimacy, it prefers crowds and tumult to gardens and ease, it prefers struggle and steel to acquiescence and cushions. New York is where you go to seize the day, to leave your mark, to live within the nerve of your generation. Some might say that there is nothing new in this—why else did Willa Cather begin in Red Cloud, Nebraska, and end on Bank Street? why else did Jackson Pollock, born in Cody, Wyoming, land in New York?

Yet there is a difference. New York ambition has changed its face. Fifty years ago, when postal clerks and bank tellers wearing vests were what were still called "family men," the hankering young were on the lowest rung of any hierarchy. Their patience was commanded; their deference was expected. It was understood that power and position were the sovereign right of middle age, and that a twenty-three-year-old would have to wait and wait. Opportunity and recognition were light-years away. A few—writers mostly—broke out early: Mary McCarthy at twenty-two, Norman Mailer at twenty-five, Philip Roth and John Updike at twenty-six. Leonard Bernstein and Bobby Fischer were youthful stars. Still, these were all prodigies and exceptions. In the run-of-the-mill world of getting ahead, the young were at the bottom, and stayed there until judged—by their elders at the top—to be sufficiently ripe. The Information Age, with its ear to the ground, reverses all that. The old ways are undone. A twenty-something young woman in publishing keeps a television set on in her office all day, monitoring possible acquisitions: what sells, who's cool. The auditory and the visual, in whatever mode, belong almost exclusively to the newest generation. Everywhere in New York, the knowledgeable young are in charge of the sound, the image, the latest word; ambition need no longer stand in line and wait its graying turn. Fifty-somethings, their passion still unspent, and recalling the slower passages of long ago, may be a little wistful.

Now and then, heartstruck, I pass the crenellated quasi-Gothic building that once housed my high school, where latecomers, myself among them, would tremble before its great arched doorway, fearing reprimand; but the reprimanders are all dead. My Latin teacher is dead. My German teacher is dead. My biology teacher is dead. It is only the city itself that lives on, half-amnesiac, hardly ever glancing back, reinventing its fabric, insisting on being noticed for what it is now. There is no grief for what precedes the common memory, and ultimately the fickle urban tide, as mutable as the Nile, accommodates every disappearance.



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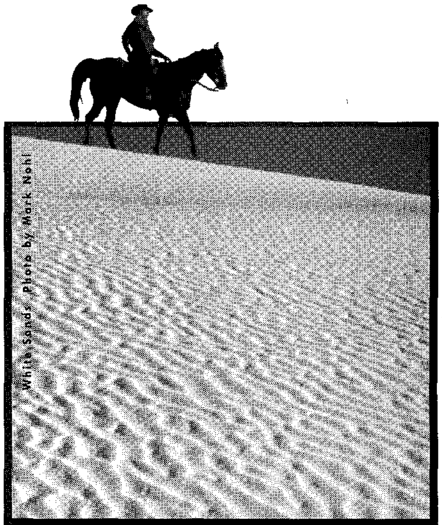
In May of 1860, when Frederick Law Olmsted's Central Park was just in the making, a forty-year-old Wall Street lawyer named George Templeton Strong recorded in his diary his own wistfulness:

> The park below the reservoir begins to look intelligible. Unfinished still, and in process of manufacture, but shewing the outline now of what it is to be. Many points are already beautiful. What will they be when their trees are grown and I'm dead and forgotten?
>
> One thinks sometimes that one would like re-juvenescence, or a new birth. One would prefer, if he could, to annihilate his past and commence life, say in this A.D. 1860, and so enjoy longer acquaintance with this era of special development and material progress, watch the splendid march of science on earth, share the benefits of the steam engine and the electric telegraph, and grow up with this park—which is to be so great a fact for the young men and maidens of New York in 1880, if all goes well and we do not decompose into anarchy meanwhile. . . . Central Park and Astor Library and a developed Columbia University promise to make the city twenty years hence a real center of culture and civilization, furnishing privileges to youth far beyond what it gave me in my boyhood.

A century and a half on, Strong's "era of special development and material progress" may seem quaint to us, for whom fax and E-mail and jets and microwaves are everyday devices, and whose moonwalkers are already old men. By now, the Park below the reservoir, the library on Fifth Avenue, and the university on Morningside Heights are seasoned inheritances—established components of the city's culture and civilization. But even standing as we do on the lip of the next millennium, who can resist falling into George Templeton Strong's wishful dream of a new birth and a longer acquaintance? His New York of steam engine and telegraph, as ephemeral as the May clouds of 1860, has ceased to be. Our New York, too, will melt away, and a renewed and clarified city will lift out of the breathing breast of the one we know. New York, Enemy of the Merely Picturesque, Headquarters of Misery and Marvel, Eraser and Renewer, Brain and Capital of the Continent!

The immigrants will come—what language will they speak? The towers will climb to the sky—what shapes will they have? The crowds will stream in the streets—what thoughts will they think? Will they think our outworn thoughts, or imaginings we cannot imagine? ♦



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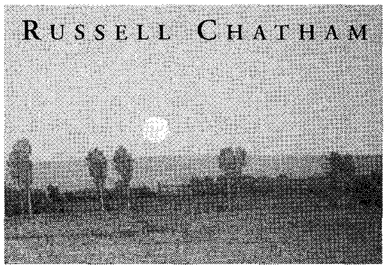

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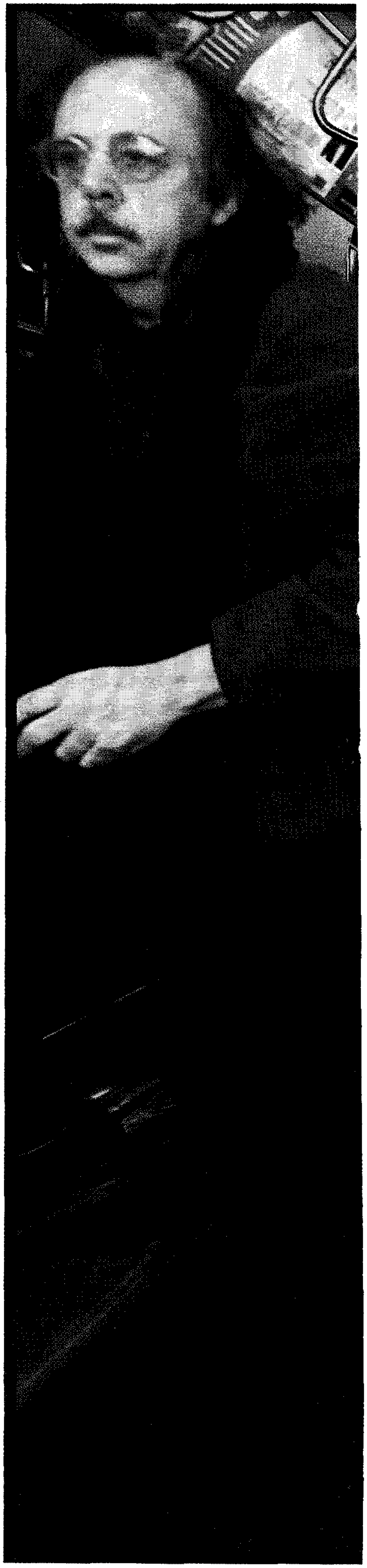
SIR ISAAC NEWTON claimed that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, and the New York theatre world proves him right. For every Broadway palace, there's an alternative playhouse running on the crazy energy of poverty. For every slick, tourist-approved long run, there's a downtown gem so bright it blinds you to its roughness. And, for every seventy-five-dollar ticket, you can buy three cheap ones, but you've got to brave a southbound train, where anything can happen.

You might bump into Richard Foreman (far left), the prolific father of the avant-garde scene, whose forty-sixth play, "Paradise Hotel," is now on at his Ontological-Hysteric Theatre. (David Patrick Kelly, far right, has been his howling mouthpiece more than once.) Maybe you'll find a seat next to the legendary actress Uta Hagen (with her poodle, G.B.), now finishing a six-month run in Donald Margulies' "Collected Stories," or next to Ellen Stewart (third from left), the founder of La Mama E.T.C., the city's cutting-edge performance space. The sadder-but-wiser transsexual Hedwig (Michael Cerveris, wigless and in drag), of John Cameron Mitchell and Stephen Trask's musical, "Hedwig and the Angry Inch," might make you a bit uncomfortable, but the worst she'll do is break your heart. Worry instead about missing "Stop Kiss," a tragicomedy by the up-and-coming playwright Diana Son (in background), or "Symphonie Fantastique," the abstract underwater puppet ballet by Basil Twist (entering train, upper right). Should you meet with a harsher misfortune, however—as dramatized here by the shameless comic actress Amy Sedaris—it's always possible that the dashing and enigmatic comedy duo Premium Bob (David Latham, swinging, and Paul Boocock, in pencil-thin mustache) will come to the rescue.

—EMILY NUNN

New York City, January 8, 1999.



DANCING

THE PATIENT IS BREATHING

Signs of life at New York City Ballet.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

"THE audience is changed," the New York City Ballet dancer Darci Kistler said to the *Times* a few years ago. "I don't know what happened." I know what happened. George Balanchine, who founded the company, with Lincoln Kirstein, and created its style and its repertory, died in 1983. Peter Martins, the troupe's foremost male star, took over, and the company went into a terrible decline. Old patrons walked out. "It's over," they said. The company then went into action, or the marketing department did, to attract a new, younger audience, one with no fixed ideas of what City Ballet should look like.

The campaign succeeded. Glancing around the theatre today, I see an audience considerably younger (better dressed, too), and very appreciative. If a dancer can't get his leg up ninety degrees, he is still applauded, for he got it up a little bit, didn't he? If the orchestra mangles the music, which it regularly does—one night a few weeks ago, in the Balanchine/Bach "Concerto Barocco," the second violin sounded like something screaming in hell—the musicians nevertheless get a hand. The new fans don't clap just at the end. They clap at the beginning. They clap when the curtain goes up: for the set, for the mere sight of ballet dancers pointing their feet. They think that looks terrific.

One watches all this with mixed feelings. On the one hand, the new audience is applauding some very bad things. Yet it is also applauding good things. Ballet dancers pointing their feet *do* look terrific. And the ballets of Balanchine, however poorly danced, are worth applauding, particularly if you have never seen them before. Last month, City Ballet spent the better part of a week performing Balanchine's so-called leotard ballets: "Agon," "Episodes," "Symphony in Three Movements," and so on. I sat among the new patrons, trying to see what they saw. Of course, I also saw what I saw—turns bobbled, details lost. Still, you can't lose the whole ballet. In "Agon," the lead woman whipping her leg around her partner's neck, simultaneously embracing and garroting him; in "Symphony in Three Movements," the diagonal lineup of sixteen women unfurling one by one, like a great wave, tipping, curling, and then down it comes: these are wonders. If they are badly done, they are nevertheless done, and with Balanchine half a loaf looks like a meal.

But the new audience should know, if only for truth's sake, that there was once another half. This season is City Ballet's fiftieth anniversary, and the company is celebrating it with a six-month festival that will include performances of a hundred ballets. The message of the festival is continuity, the idea that the Martins administration is simply carrying forward the tradition of Balanchine and Kirstein. "This is their place, this is their house," Martins said in his opening-night speech. No mention of the fact that since Balanchine's death a large number of his ballets have been shoved into storage—formerly the staple, his works now constitute only about half of any repertory season—while their place has been taken by a series of almost uniformly forgettable ballets by Martins and others. (Martins' "Walton Cello Concerto," the new offering this season, was just one more.)

No discussion, either, of any changes in Balanchine's unique style of dancing, that mesh of steel and soul which he spent his whole life developing. On the contrary, the opening night was programmed to demonstrate that the Balanchine style was still in force. First, we were shown a 1956 video clip of "Concerto Barocco," as danced by Tanaquil Le Clercq—a personification of Balanchine's style, and also his last wife, and the honoree of the festival's opening night, and, not incidentally, the holder of the American rights to most of his repertory, on which N.Y.C.B. depends. The video was thrilling. Even if you knew it (it's famous), it gave you chills again. Le Clercq stood at arm's length from her partner (Jacques d'Amboise), and pirouetted, now inward, now outward, against him. Her movement had a whiplike momentum: this was something private, something understood between them. Yet, again and again, as she turned to face us, she opened her arms to us, gathering us into the event. There it was, the Balanchine style: objective—no dramatics—and yet piercing. The film having been shown, the curtain was raised, and Yvonne Borree, one of the company's young principal dancers, launched into "Concerto Barocco." And her performance could not have been more different from Le Clercq's. No whip, no dynamics, no sense of life's old story—just a young person doing the steps she had been told to do, and trying not to make a mistake.

This kind of dancing—dancing without emphases, without any phrasing to speak of, without *courage*—is one of the current company's two radical breaks with the Balanchine tradition. The other is the loss of technique. There are a number of reviewers who will tell you that the company's technical strength remains undiminished. I wish that they had been at the "Nutcracker" I saw in early December. The leader of the Marzipan shepherdesses couldn't do the pirouette to the knee. Coffee, the Arabian-dance soloist, couldn't do the pirouette into arabesque. The Sugar Plum Fairy and her cavalier seemed never to have met before, let alone rehearsed together. But it's not just a matter of this or that step. Season by season, the dancers are losing their turnout, the hundred-and-eighty-degree rotation of the legs which opens the body like a book, making it fully readable. As a result, steps that used to look as though they'd been etched with a calligraphic pen now seem smeared in with a heated crayon.

I once cornered a dancer who had worked under Balanchine and then under Martins, and I asked her what was the matter. Why couldn't the dancers do the steps? "Company class," she said—the hour-and-a-half class that the dancers take at the theatre every morning.

Maria Kowroski, New York City Ballet soloist, Broadway and Sixty-fifth Street, January 11, 1999.

During the late Balanchine years, the old master himself taught the class, and it was notoriously hard. "Your muscles would burn. You'd feel awkward. It *hurt*," the dancer said. "And you learned. But for someone to ask that, he has to have the dancers' ultimate respect."

Actually, Balanchine had more than the dancers' respect. He was the focus of their keenest ambitions. He was a great artist, they knew. More to the point, he was a *creator* of great artists. If they showed him speed and soul and turnout, he might cast them as leading dancers in his ballets. They would become beautiful, profound, famous. "Dancers would do anything for Balanchine," my informant said. (Other Balanchine dancers, such as Maria Tallchief and Suzanne Farrell, have said the same thing in their memoirs.) But when Martins came in he did not have this edge. On the contrary, he needed supporters, needed to be liked. Not surprisingly, class got easier. "We used to start with thirty-two tendus. Now we do sixteen. Feels much better!" the dancer said. We are seeing the results.

Nor should anyone think that the problems come only in the Balanchine ballets, where the steps are so hard, the critics so watchful. In 1987, Peter Martins made a ballet for nine men, "Les Gentilhommes," that seemed designed to show what Martins—who was trained at the Royal Danish Ballet, where men are as important as women—could do for male dancers. "Hey," we all said, "maybe he can't do much for women, but look how gorgeous he makes the men." Last month, the company revived "Les Gentilhommes," and such a spectacle of slack legs and blubbery feet you have never seen. If Martins was going to glorify his men, he should have kept their technique up.

BUT things could change. In the past two or three years, the company has started looking better. I can't say why; I can only say what—the younger dancers, mostly. There is a small crop of newcomers, some still in the corps de ballet (Rachel Rutherford, Amanda Edge), others recently promoted to soloist rank (Jennie Somogyi, Christopher Wheeldon, Sébastien Marcovici, Alexandra Ansanelli), who are suddenly dancing with a spiritedness rarely seen around N.Y.C.B. even three years ago. And Martins, who once appeared reluctant to give important assignments to any dancer, no matter how promising, who

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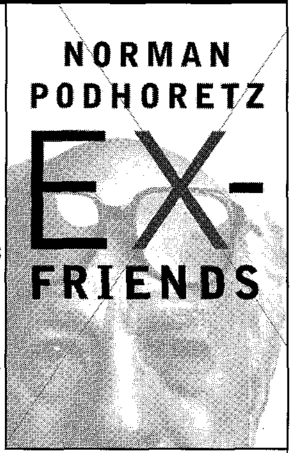

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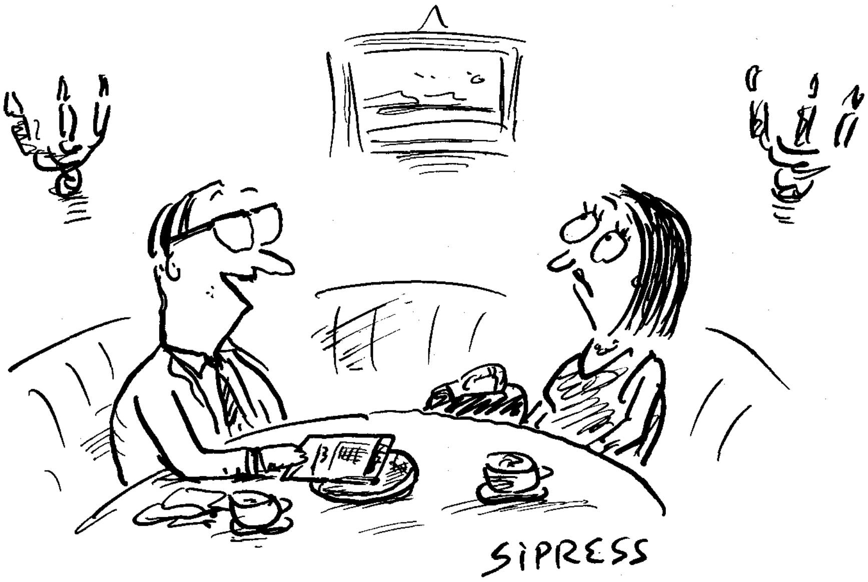

"The social conservative in me tells me to pay for dinner, but the fiscal conservative thinks we should split it."

• •

had not put in his or her "time," is energetically promoting these youngsters. Ansanelli, who just turned eighteen, has been thrown into role after major role. Her feet are knobby, and she tends to fall down, but she's a ball of fire. Two weeks ago, Rutherford danced Le Clercq's great role in "La Valse," and it was a joy to watch: a young animal at its dinner. Somogyi was cast this season as the "second woman" in "Concerto Barocco," and there is nothing that could be done in that role that she did not do. She was in her next jump before she had finished her last jump. Her waist bent like a snake; her arms rose as if offering us the Nobel Prize. I don't know if this was what Balanchine wanted, but it was something human and exciting, something to make you, two nights later, pull on your boots and go out into the cold to see New York City Ballet again.

There are changes at the top, too, notably in Wendy Whelan, who is probably the company's most frequently cast lead woman. For years, Whelan was a dry, correct dancer: now I do this, now I do that. But in the past few seasons she has undergone a mysterious transformation. She seems happy to be on the stage, seems to feel that she belongs there—that whatever *she* is can carry the ballet. And so it does. Correspondingly, there are signs of activity in the soul of Miranda Weese, a recently promoted principal dancer who, before, appeared to cast herself in the body-snatcher mold of the early Whelan. This season, in "Symphony in Three Movements," Weese clearly saw that the slow sections were different from the fast ones, that the pas de deux—just her and a man out there—was something other than the ensemble passages, with thirty-two people onstage. Her brow darkened; her movement thickened in some places, lightened in others. She was making art, or trying.

CITY BALLET is not necessarily on an upswing. The new energy may flag. The young dancers may give up and learn to be boring. It happens all the time. But suppose there is a renewed purpose at N.Y.C.B. Where should it be directed? One thing the company desperately needs, if it is to go on dancing Balanchine's work, is a big, "spiritual" ballerina. Balanchine made many kinds of female roles, but at the center of his repertory is the image of an ideal woman, for whom a man would give his soul—or, to desexualize it, a grave, exalted image whom all of us, male and female, recognize as the figure of fate. From ballet to ballet—"Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto," "Chaconne," "La Sonnambula," "Walpurgisnacht Ballet," "Diamonds," "Robert Schumann's 'Davidsbündlertänze,'" "Liebeslieder Walzer"—the image appears in different guises. Its most direct manifestation is the ballerina in the second movement of "Symphony in C," whom Balanchine, in an unguarded moment (he didn't like to talk about such things), described as the moon crossing the heavens.

Diana Adams was once this ideal woman; then it was Suzanne Farrell and Allegra Kent, then Darci Kistler. In recent years, the company has cast Whelan in the part, and she is utterly wrong for it. She is one of Balanchine's women, but a different one—the American Girl, the Patricia McBride figure. City Ballet needs to find its soul-monarch. One obvious candidate is Maria Kowroski, and Peter Martins knows this, for he recently cast her in the soul-goddess role in "Liebeslieder Walzer." She could not quite scale the pedestal—it must be hard in these de-gendering days—but the part was new to her. In other ballets, she has shown that she can work on a grand scale. Physically, she is perfect: hands like petals, legs like something swinging through the sky. Her only problem is that she's too reserved. Someone should give her her head, or she should just take it.

The other candidate is Monique Meunier. In a way, she is the opposite of Kowroski. She is not reserved enough. She is overweight; she is untidy; she relies too much on her charisma. But what charisma! She is big and blond and sexy, and she loves the stage, loves the music, rides it like a horse. In all my life, I have never seen anyone more clearly born to be a dancer. Because she is so extroverted and so lovable, the company tends to cast her in "personality" roles—sexpot roles, character-dance roles. But she is too good to be wasted on personality. What her ebullience needs is containment. She needs to be put in a girdle: the queen roles. At the School of American Ballet's year-end recital in 1989, she danced the second movement of "Symphony in C"—the moon crossing the heavens—and we all just about fainted. That she has not been cast in this role by the company is inexplicable.

The other thing that the administration must look to is technique. This may seem the opposite of "soul," but it is not. On the contrary, the dancers' technical achievement under Balanchine may have been the secret of their spiritual force. What is turnout, after all, but the prying open of the body, of the self? The "soul" of the older Balanchine dancers, their ability to tell us about life's peril, may well have been simply the result of their encounter with the peril of Balanchine's demands. Those demands, by making them work until they hurt, acted upon them symbolically, made them both proud and vulnerable, made them human.

Either way, both ways—technique and soul—the job for the dancers at N.Y.C.B. today is to put themselves on the line. In a 1985 interview, Suzanne Farrell told *Dance Magazine* that one of the most difficult things for her in teaching was to get the students to make the steps interesting: "'Well,' I say, 'You're doing exactly what I said, but it's not interesting to watch.'" This may seem a hard criticism for a bunch of teen-agers to swallow, but in ballet teen-agers are often what you're dealing with. (The average age at N.Y.C.B. is twenty.) The sooner someone suggests to them that they are artists—this is what Farrell was suggesting—the better. I suspect that, apart from cleaner feet, what the young City Ballet dancers need more than anything is confidence, a sense that they are part of a consuming enterprise. N.Y.C.B. will never be what it was under Balanchine. At best, it will be something wholly different, into which, however, the lessons of Balanchine will have been absorbed, as Mozart was absorbed into Beethoven. Being interesting is one of those lessons, and, until the Beethoven comes along, it could serve as a minimum standard.

I LEFT leotard week with one overriding image: Darci Kistler in the final movement of "Episodes," the Ricercata, to Webern's orchestration of Bach. Kistler, the last ballerina trained by Balanchine, has had a hard career. She broke her ankle at the age of eighteen, and she has suffered further injuries since. She is no longer strong. But she has always had the ability to seize the threads of a ballet and draw them to her, giving the whole thing shape and urgency. This is what she did in the Ricercata. The careful positions of the arms, the beautiful unfoldings of the leg: she delivered these things to us as if she were telling us the greatest story ever told. Lofted by her dancing, Bach's glorious music (appallingly played; you couldn't find the beat; it's a wonder she could dance to it) rose over her like a dome. She lifted her face to the light; it shone on her. Yes, Kistler was a creation of the old administration, but looking at her—and the younger dancers should look at her—you could not help feeling that there was hope for the new. ♦

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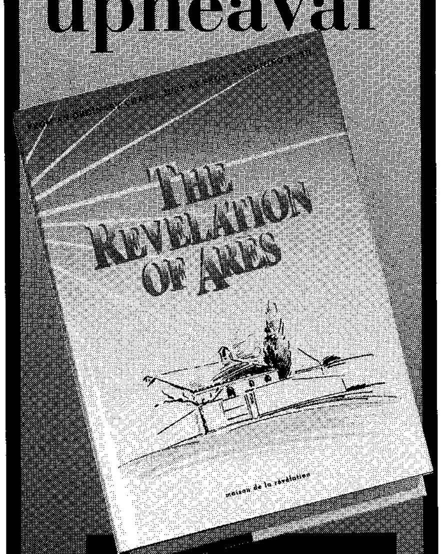

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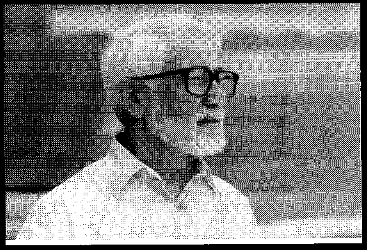

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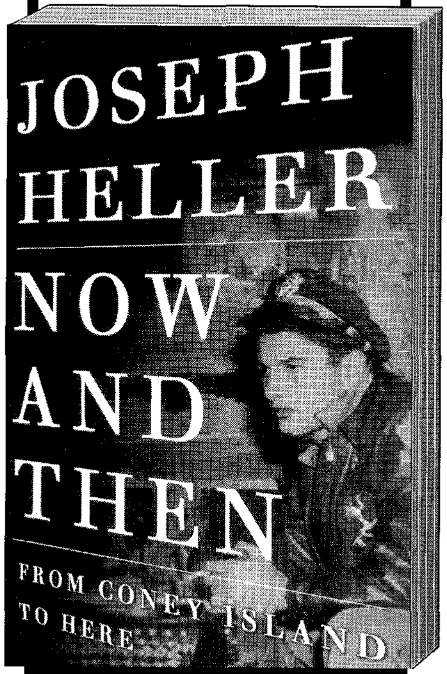

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BOOKS

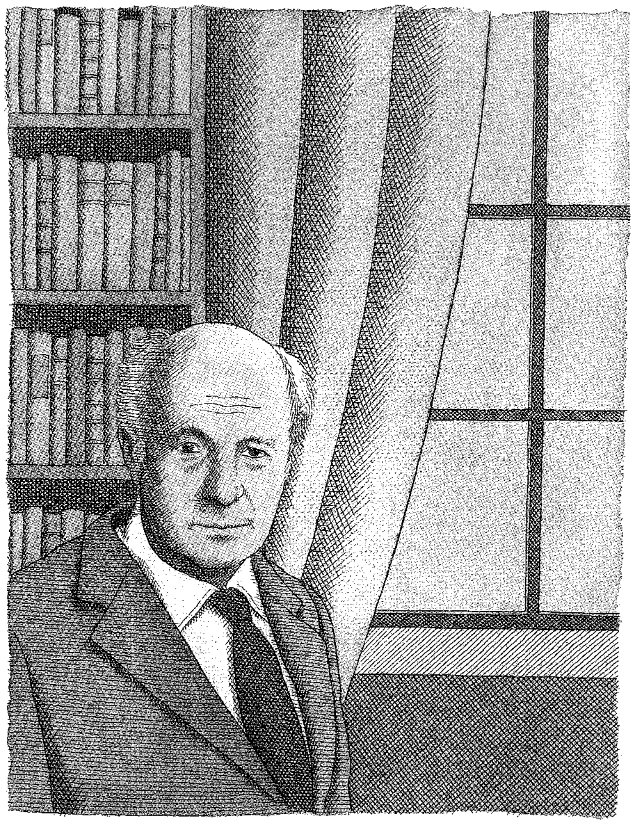
GETTING EVEN

In friendships begin grudges, especially literary friendships.

BY DAPHNE MERKIN

ONCE, what seems like a long time ago, there was a party of eggheads. The party was ongoing, and its habitués, who were passionate about the life of the mind the way that stockbrokers are passionate about the life of commerce, were known as the New York Intellectuals. Among themselves, they were also known, with a pugnacious kind of affection, as the Family, and when they got together, in the Village or up in Morningside Heights, they drank ferociously and talked even harder. The men eyed the women, and the women sized one another up, but mostly they all argued, nearly coming to blows over who was an anti-Communist, who was an anti-anti-Communist, who was soft on Stalin, and whose liberalism was of a suspiciously revisionist cast. They were professionally opinionated: their strong positions on matters literary and political were expressed in the house organs—*Partisan Review*, *Commentary*, and, to a lesser degree, *The New Leader* and *Dissent*—and they cared immensely about these positions, as often as not passing around copies of their pieces in galley before they appeared in print.

The Family first came into being in 1934, with the founding of *Partisan Review* (a magazine whose original platform was Communist), and its heyday lasted for about twenty-five years, from the mid-forties to the late sixties, by which time some of its members had wandered over to the *New York Review of Books*. The group spawned several "generations" of thinkers, including critics, philosophers, poets, sociologists, and novelists, many of whom had reputations that extended beyond the confines of their own book-lined living rooms: Lionel and Diana Trilling, Hannah Arendt, Clement Greenberg, Philip Rahv, William Phillips, Mary McCarthy, Irving Howe, Dwight Macdonald, F. W. Dupee. With



An intellect on the move: Norman Podhoretz, once Trilling's protégé, looks back on the leftist set he abandoned.

PIERRE LE-TAN

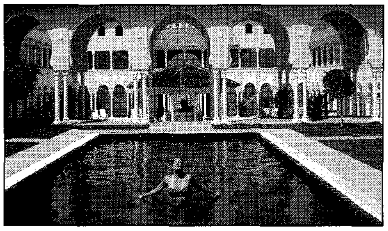
a few exceptions, they were Jewish, and, with even fewer exceptions, their tone was muscular and engaged; these were the voices not of cultural bystanders but of participants diving into the fray. As is true of all families, whether joined by blood or by shared interests, the power of this one lay as much in its ability to exclude as to include. Some writers, such as Norman Mailer, Robert Warshow, and Robert Lowell, were never quite accepted as part of the *mishpocha*, mostly for reasons of envy or snobbery: the first because he wrote best-sellers, the second because he wrote about the middlebrow subject of movies, and the last because it wasn't clear how he fit in.

One of the more controversial figures to have emerged from the ranks of these intellectuals is Norman Podhoretz. He has never feared to hold vigorously contrarian views—or to alienate people he cozied up to when he still shared their convictions—and he burst on the scene after soaking in the literary atmosphere of Columbia and Cambridge, where he was a protégé of both Trilling and F. R. Leavis. With what would become a characteristic note of you-can't-tell-me-what-to-think defiance, Podhoretz made his début in *Commentary* in 1953, at the age of twenty-three, with a negative review of Bernard Malamud's "The Natural," followed shortly by a negative review of Saul Bellow's "The Adventures of Augie March." He went on to become the editor of *Commentary* at the green age of thirty, and he held that job for the next thirty-five years. He coaxed the magazine—which had become both patriotic and parochial under the editorship of Elliot Cohen—in the direction of the wider counterculture, publishing utopian mavericks like Paul Goodman as well as a gushy evaluation of the nuclear-arms race by David Riesman which proposed that the Soviet-American conflict was no more than an advanced case of sibling rivalry.

Having been embraced early on as the Family's darling, Podhoretz was ejected as though he were a gauche gate-crasher after he came out with the cerebral version of a kiss-and-tell called "Making It," in 1967. The unpardonable sin of the book was that he owned up to his wish—and, by implication, all the literati's wish—to be read, admired, and talked about. "What I wanted," he confided, "was to see my name in print, to be praised, and above all to attract attention." Possessed of a robustly imperial self, Podhoretz adduced his personal hunger for success as being indicative of a larger cultural appetite, albeit one that didn't dare yet speak its name. In the preface to "Making It," he wrote that "ambition (itself a species of lustful hunger) seems to be replacing erotic lust as the prime dirty little secret of the well-educated American soul." It's clear that the book hit a nerve not only because of its exhibitionist candor but because of its sales-director approach to the sanctified realm of ideas; in retrospect, it seems positively prescient about both the acquisitive egotism of the eighties and the wave of literary confessionalism which began in that decade.

Podhoretz went on to enrage the clan even more when, beginning in the early seventies, he abandoned its de-rigueur left-of-center political line for a burgeoning set of attitudes that we now recognize as neoconservatism. In his writing, he took an increasingly hawkish position on Israel and an aggressive foreign-policy stance that would ultimately be epitomized in Reagan's "evil empire" approach to the Soviet Union, while his patience with the concerns of minorities and the disenfranchised decreased. In 1979, he published a second memoir, "Breaking Ranks," which delineated this radical shift in his thinking. Although the seeds of his ideological transplanting had already been sown (he was bullish on America while Mary McCarthy was extolling the virtues of North Vietnam), the final unmaking of Podhoretz's halfhearted leftism was the negative response to "Making It." Once the glam left crowd had snubbed him in both the *New York Review* and *Partisan Review*, he found new confrères among the William F. Buckley–Irving Kristol set.

Now we have the last part of what looks to be a trilogy—or, perhaps, the latest installment in a continuing assessment of roads forsaken and enemies overtaken. Podhoretz's new memoir is called—with more than a smidgen of braggadocio—"Ex-Friends: Falling Out with Allen Ginsberg, Lionel and Diana



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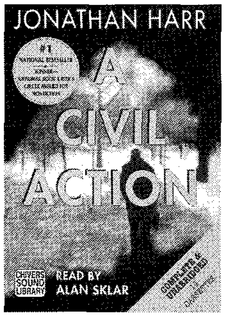

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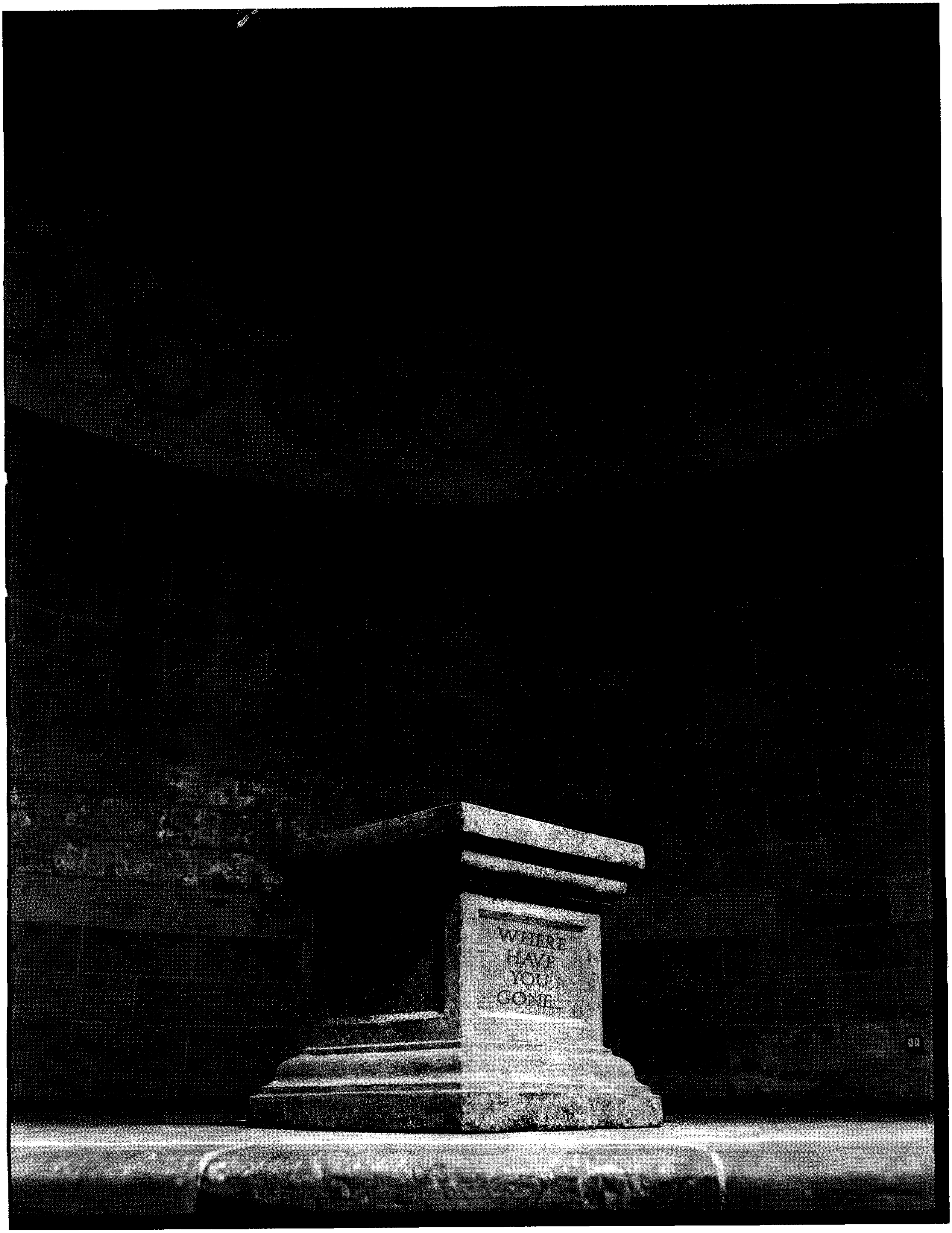
Trilling, Lillian Hellman, Hannah Arendt, and Norman Mailer" (Free Press; $25). For those who may wonder why an old Kulturkampf warrior like Podhoretz would bother to sift through the ashes of burnt-out relationships (with the exception of Mailer, these are dead ex-friends), bear in mind that for some people getting even is just another way of saying, "Hello, I'm thinking of you." Although the portraits in "Ex-Friends" are laced with rancor, they are also touched by a crusty, almost resisted tenderness. Having made Diana Trilling out to be a loony intellectual dominatrix early in the book, Podhoretz suddenly writes with grudging admiration of her in the last chapter, "She was a great pain in the neck even when we were friends, but at the same time, she was so quirky in her take on things that being involved with her invariably made life more complicated and therefore more interesting." Nostalgia is not an expedient emotion, and I'm not sure how well it sits with Podhoretz's realpolitik side, but I can't help feeling that "falling out" with these characters—not one of whom, you can be sure, was a picnic—means as much to him as having fallen in with his present illustrious Washington crowd, who merit barely a mention.

HOW friendly do you have to have been with someone in order for that person to cease being your friend? Podhoretz's rendition of his relationship with Ginsberg, in the first chapter, suggests that his standards for friendship are fairly minimal, especially when fame enters the picture. "I have often said," Podhoretz writes in the book's opening sentence, "that if I wish to name-drop, I have only to list my ex-friends." The two men met in 1946, when they were both undergraduates at Columbia, and Ginsberg accepted a poem of Podhoretz's for the college literary magazine. In "Making It" Podhoretz, who was the son of a milkman, confided that he had once planned to commit suicide if he failed to become a great poet by the age of twenty-five; here he briskly disposes of his unrealizable dream by noting that the poem, with its "adolescent Whitmanesque frenzies," made him "cringe" when he came upon it in later years, whereas "a precociously poised and accomplished critical essay" he'd written gave evidence of his true calling. In any case, the two students don't appear to have actually had much contact—Ginsberg was several years ahead of Podhoretz and "in the process of discovering himself as a homosexual"—but we are given to understand that, through some inexplicable process of personal influence, Podhoretz came to stand for something larger than himself in the poet's mind. Ginsberg was disappointed when Podhoretz failed to review "Howl" after he'd sent him an advance copy: "He had kept close enough track of me," Podhoretz observes, with reflexive cynicism, "to know that I was now an established literary critic and therefore in a position to do him a certain amount of good." And in the ensuing years Ginsberg kept trying to win the younger man over, despite their inhabiting of antithetical universes, and despite Podhoretz's repeated attacks on the Beat ethos.

One such attack, an essay entitled "The Know-Nothing Bohemians," which appeared in *Partisan Review* in 1958, was "a scathing indictment, and it bothered Ginsberg so deeply that he would never get over it," Podhoretz ringingly asserts. At the time, the poet responded by having Jack Kerouac's girlfriend phone Podhoretz and invite him over for tea—as though they might politely agree to disagree like a couple of Boston bluestockings rather than the two loudmouths they were, one from Brownsville and the other from Newark. Podhoretz refused to join Ginsberg, Kerouac, his girlfriend, and Ginsberg's lover, Peter Orlovsky, in smoking marijuana, and the evening was "tense and unpleasant." Almost four decades later, Ginsberg, on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, was still obsessed with Podhoretz, ruminating to the *Times* about the role Podhoretz had played in his imagination: "All those years he's had to suffer all my contumely in my head. It's served as an education, to make me think my thoughts. He's been a great help."

The purpose of Podhoretz's somewhat self-serving account of this is, I think, twofold. It provides him with an opportunity to air some of his blistering attitudes about "the spiritual etiology of homosexuality" (which he believes is based on the male fear of female life-bearing capacities), sixties radicals ("What they all had in common was a fierce hatred of America"), and the whole drop-out culture of drugs and promiscuous sex ("A new kind of plague"). Its other agenda, however, is more subliminal; we are meant to collude with Podhoretz in despising Ginsberg's pathetic attempts to get him to trade in his polemical guns and start wearing flowers in his hair. There is much of the street bully in Podhoretz; he believes in a natural hierarchy, and nothing makes him more nervous than a neighborhood loser who thinks he can tag along with the big boys. He doesn't have much patience with writers who are less than great—which leaves out everyone, it seems, but Thomas Mann—and, indeed, he treats the literary game like a form of horse racing. (In the chapter called "A Foul-Weather Friend to Norman Mailer," he observes orotundly, puffing on an invisible cigar, "I once ventured the proposition that there was a sense in which the validity of a whole phase of American experience—the move in the 1950s away from 'alienation' and toward self-acceptance as an American—was felt to hang on the question of whether or not Saul Bellow . . . would turn out to be a great novelist.") If Podhoretz doesn't come right out and call Ginsberg a failure, he shrewdly suggests that the poet came to realize, much like a rebellious teen-ager who suspects his parents have his number, that he trafficked in fraudulent goods and that his old college pal was the only one who had the guts to call him on it. "Was he so disturbed by me," Podhoretz muses, "because in his heart of hearts he knew that . . . my rejection of his extravagant claims to greatness as a poet and my arguments against his antinomian ideas could not be dismissed out of hand as the ravings of an ignorant philistine? . . . Might he at moments even have feared that I might be right?"

It doesn't occur to Podhoretz that Ginsberg may have genuinely liked him and respected his brains, their differences notwithstanding. Or that the porous, "om"-chanting persona that the poet cultivated led him to try to disarm those rigid establishment types who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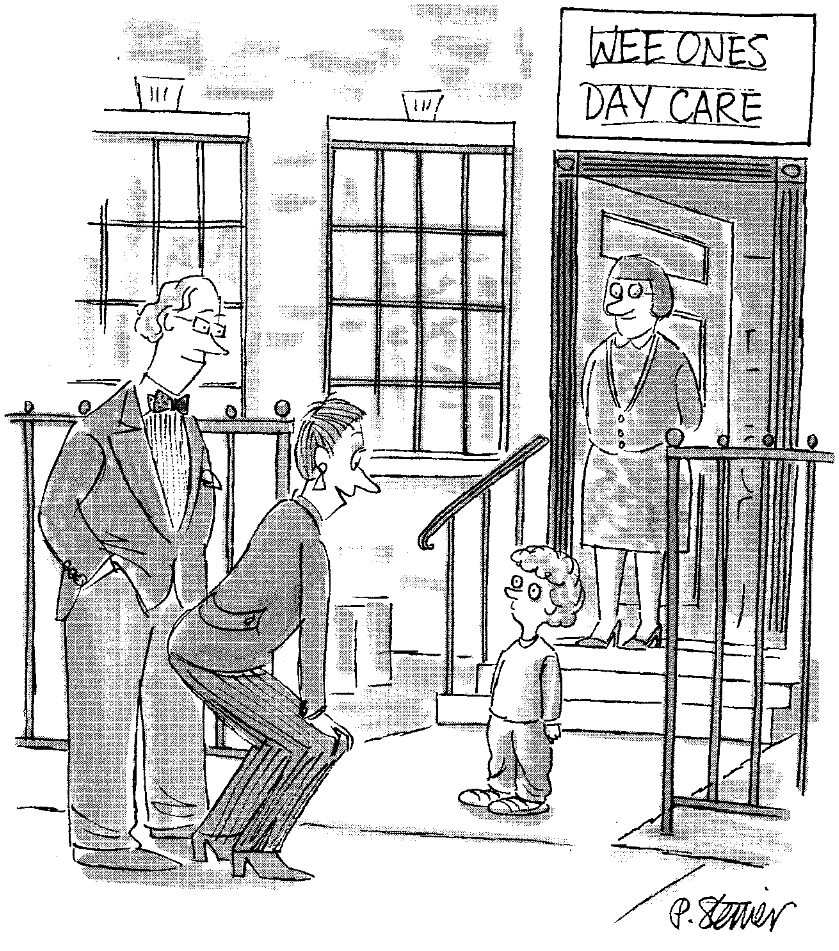
believed in God and country. There is something deeply affecting about Ginsberg's running internal conversation with Podhoretz, and about the way he empowered the editor of *Commentary* with supreme cultural consequence, seeing him as both his enemy, "a wall I can butt my head against," and his hero, "a sort of sacred personage in my life." On a human level, Ginsberg emerges as the larger person—one willing to run the risk of appearing so foolish as to crave the good will of an unrelenting antagonist like Podhoretz.

FORMIDABLE though its author may be, "Ex-Friends" is not only immensely readable but even charming in places. Podhoretz writes a virile, offhand prose that moves easily between novelistic scene-setting—"Unaware of what I had in the works about him, Mailer eyed me with a leer that mixed menace with irony when we encountered each other in Lillian Hellman's living room"—and savvy exposition: "Unlike the 'deconstructionist' literary critics of a later era, however, who would see things that, as they themselves would insouciantly acknowledge, were not actually there, we were very strict about submitting to the poet's imaginative intentions as realized in the text." Perhaps a more vigilant editor would have pruned some of his klutzier locutions ("about which more in a moment"; "as I will relate in some detail below") and toned down his childishly competitive tendency to toot his own horn. We learn that Podhoretz had more physical moxie than Ginsberg and that he conquered the sexual arena much earlier than Mailer, "having enjoyed an amount of success with girls that was unusual for those days." (This is when he's not busy taking credit for spreading someone else's fame, whether it's Goodman's or Norman O. Brown's.) But these excesses are undoubtedly part of Podhoretz's peacockish allure, for his confidence in himself is matched only by his wish for everyone else to share this confidence. It makes for a kind of strong-arming seduction; half of him is the class showoff, and the other half is reminiscent of Sally Field at the Academy Awards, exclaiming wonderingly, "You like me, you really like me!"

Any memoir, whether by a con artist or a statesman, sooner or later raises the question: How honest is it? "Ex-Friends" is honest enough, I would say, to suit its purposes, without being painfully introspective. Podhoretz admits to unpleasant behavior on a number of occasions (he sold Diana Trilling down the river several times over) as well as moments of bad faith, especially regarding his friendship with Lillian Hellman, where he overlooked politics entirely in exchange for good food and swanky backdrops. He is toughest on himself in the chapter called "Hannah Arendt's Jewish Problem—and Mine" (the title refers to his famous essay "My Negro Problem—and Ours"), in which he examines his youthful miscalculation in overvaluing the originality of Arendt's thinking. In time, he came to see that the agile philosophical stratagems he had admired in "The Origins of Totalitarianism" fell morally short when Arendt applied them to the issues of Nazi culpability and Jewish complicity in "Eichmann in Jerusalem." This section shows Podhoretz at his most impassioned and articulately tribal, as when he elucidates the "double standard" that leftist Jews apply to the state of Israel. He is also capable of astute observations about complex characters such as Mailer, whose talent for insinuating flattery he sums up with appreciative humor: "He would inform some perfectly ordinary and uninteresting girl that she could have been a great madam running the best whorehouse in town . . . and once the initial shock wore off, she would be delighted. Or he might with similar effect tell some equally vacuous young man that he was a general at heart or a bullfighter." Podhoretz understands Mailer's infatuation with "the circles of power" from the inside out (both men flutter like eager headwaiters over Jackie Kennedy). He admits that "Mailer's ambition for greatness . . . was one of the main sources of my attraction to him," although the poor deluded fellow proves to be another horse that doesn't come in, since, in



"Bye-bye, sweetie. Daddy and I will pick you up when you're eighteen."

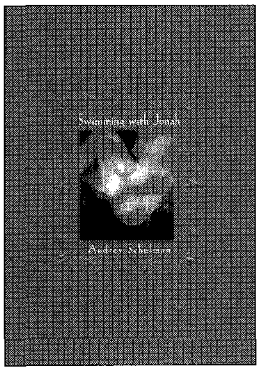
Podhoretz's judgment, he never lived up to the claims he made for his work.

THE last chapter of "Ex-Friends" is entitled "Requiem for a Lost World," and one might, indeed, interpret the book as a lament—a yahrzeit for a time and a place in which Podhoretz "shared in some of the best and most scintillating talk I have ever had." Yet in the end this is the memoir of a man who never lingered before the prospect of moving on; it displays the zeal for conquest that might be found in the pages of a C.E.O.'s autobiography. One can easily overlook the fact that Podhoretz voluntarily forsook the company of Henry James for that of Henry Kissinger—that somewhere along the way the young man who was "Trilling's favorite student" abandoned the still backwaters of literary prestige for the bustling corridors of political power. There's nothing intrinsically blameworthy in this, and perhaps Podhoretz was a Tory in the making all along: he had planned to write his thesis at Cambridge on the political novels of Disraeli. Does he look back and wonder whether he should have stuck with Yeats, whose poetry he ardently quotes? Or does he think he has had the best of both worlds, gliding effortlessly from a community governed by artistic values to one governed by family values?

In some ways, Podhoretz has always been ahead of the curve, for, alas, the New York intellectuals have no real equivalent today. The connective tissue between literature and politics has been almost entirely severed in the past two and a half decades, and the glitz has gone out of critical discourse. No one seriously cares what one writer has to say about another writer's book; such exchanges no longer send out ripples, no longer provoke the "unique excitement" that Podhoretz attributed to the highbrow writing of the fifties. For him, as for the world at large, the clinking change of reality—tomorrow's news—has replaced the currency of ideas. In a rare moment of untempered praise, Podhoretz describes the author of "The Liberal Imagination" as "the most intelligent person I have ever known." It's hard to imagine Lionel Trilling, if he were still here, chatting away at a cocktail party of conservative policy wonks who wouldn't know Thomas Mann from Clarence Thomas. But in any case he wouldn't be invited. ♦

(Advt.)

There is perhaps no quest more universal—in our real lives and in our fiction alike—than the search for individual identity.



As she did in her critically acclaimed debut novel, **Audrey Schulman** once again strands a troubled young woman in a dangerous, isolated environment, where the protagonist is tested, both physically and emotionally. In ***SWIMMING WITH JONAH***, however, Hell is not the frigid arctic wastes the author so credibly evoked in *The Cage*—but rather a "last chance" medical school on a remote tropical island in Indonesia. Here Jane Guy—the awkward, insecure daughter of a well-known physician—must contend with oppressive heat, rampant despair, and the psychological abuse of a cruel, jaded teaching faculty. This is a strong and provocative tale about the profound changes Jane undergoes in both body and spirit as she struggles to ward off the madness, fear, and hopelessness swallowing up so many around her like the great fish that ingested the biblical Jonah.

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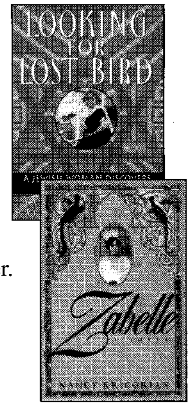

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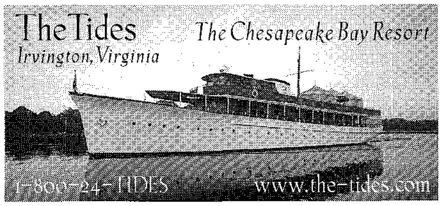

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BRIEFLY NOTED

WRITING NEW YORK: A LITERARY ANTHOLOGY, edited by Phillip Lopate (Library of America; $40). Inspired by the city planner Robert Moses' statement that "New York is just too big, too complex to be served by any one writer," the essayist Phillip Lopate has assembled a volume of Gotham-related journalism, poetry, fiction, essays, and diaries which is as rich and varied as its subject, and suitably large (more than a thousand pages). The works are arranged chronologically, beginning with Washington Irving and ending with Vivian Gornick, and they serve as a history of the city's allure for writers. But, like the city, these selections are best sampled at random, depending on your mood: if Dawn Powell's disappointment is too much to bear one day, it may be consoling the next, and in the meantime you may be cheered by Mark Twain's mocking disdain for the *Herald's* personal ads or by Helen Keller's impressions of a ferry ride from Jersey City to Manhattan.

STREET KINGDOM: FIVE YEARS INSIDE THE FRANKLIN AVENUE POSSE, by Douglas Century (Warner; $25). When Century, a contributing editor at the *Forward*, attends a poetry slam in the East Village and meets Big K, a Panamanian rapper and ex-drug dealer from Brooklyn, an unlikely friendship develops. K introduces Century to the world of his childhood gang—Crown Heights's Franklin Avenue Posse, for whom drugs, automatic weapons, and visits to incarcerated family members are commonplace—while the author tries to help K on equally foreign turf, in his dealings with entertainment-business scam artists. If Century's occasional ghetto posturing can seem foolish, he nonetheless renders K's complicated life with compassion.

THE LAST AVANT-GARDE: THE MAKING OF THE NEW YORK SCHOOL OF POETS, by David Lehman (Doubleday; $27.50). It was during the stuffy fifties, Lehman reminds us, that the experimental energy in the city's painting and poetry was at its height: Jackson Pollock was doing his "drip" paintings and tearing the men's-room door off its hinges at the Cedar Tavern, and the four friends who made up the New York School of poets—John Ashbery, Frank O'Hara, Kenneth Koch, and James Schuyler—set out to strip their art of its perfumed overtones and dead rhythms. Though they were drawn together by common backgrounds and passions (three of the four went to Harvard; three of the four were homosexual; three of the four became art critics), their collaboration resulted in very different styles, and Lehman, a poet, is at his best as an explicator and appreciator of their work. He delivers a helpful analysis of Ashbery's self-effacing indirections, embraces Koch's high-spirited academic humor, and directs us to the pared-down lyricism that the unstable Schuyler achieved miraculously on the page. But the quartet's first violin was O'Hara, whose swaggering boyish brio and "I do this, I do that" litanies cracked the genre open and left it forever altered.

A SECRET LOCATION ON THE LOWER EAST SIDE, by Steven Clay and Rodney Phillips (New York Public Library/Granary Books; $27.95). Between the end of the Second World War and the advent of desk-top publishing, the American literary underground had its own "little magazines": small-circulation journals published on mimeograph or ditto machines. In loving detail, Clay and Phillips recount the history of nearly a hundred such publications, ranging from Lawrence Ferlinghetti's *City Lights Journal* to Ed Sanders's *Fuck You, a magazine of the arts*. Their overview of the "mimeo revolution" summons up an era when the forging of literary communities demanded more commitment than posting a page on the Internet.

HIRSCHFELD ON LINE, by Al Hirschfeld (Applause; $49.95). Hirschfeld, who will turn ninety-six on the first day of summer, is the irreplaceable M.V.P. of the New York theatre world, and this compendium of his drawings amounts to a historic work of droll, generous-minded theatre criticism. The artist himself has annotated the drawings, which cover a range of the performing arts (included here is his first drawing for the *Times*, of Harry Lauder, in 1927), and his comments are as swooping and witty as his lines. ("Lauder was a Scotch comic who at that time was in one of his interminable farewell-performance runs. Somewhat like those stores that are forever going out of business.")

THE NEIGHBORHOODS OF BROOKLYN, edited by Kenneth T. Jackson and John B. Manbeck (Citizens Committee for New York City/Yale; $29.95). In the nineteen-forties, where could you find the world's largest producer of leis? At the American Merri-Lei factory, on Halsey Street, in Bedford-Stuyvesant. And what are the five black arts historically practiced in Greenpoint? Printing, pottery, petroleum refining, ironmaking, and the manufacture of glass. In forty-five chapters (Brownsville, Bushwick, Canarsie, etc.) filled with maps, street-corner photographs, history, and local lore, this first volume of a projected five-borough series indexes the ninety neighborhoods of the onetime Dutch possession of Breuckelen. As with the place itself, there are surprising rewards to getting lost here.

INVISIBLE NEW YORK, by Stanley Greenberg (Johns Hopkins; $29.95). This stately and haunting collection of large-format black-and-white photographs reveals the city's hidden—and, in many places, crumbling or decrepit—infrastructure: a vault beneath the Brooklyn Bridge, once rented to a wine merchant for champagne storage; weed-encrusted Nike missile silos adjoining Potter's Field, on Hart Island; the massive remains of the West Side piers, rotting into the Hudson. Alongside these images, even the newly functional attic space above the ceiling in Grand Central Terminal (where the bulbs inside the constellations get changed) and the nuclear-blast-resistant water tunnel still under construction beneath the Bronx take on an Ozymandian melancholy.

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18	MA(GRIT)TE
19	A D + UE (*cue* − *c*)
20	LIRA (anag.)
21	LYNX (*links* hom.)
22	SPAT (*taps* rev.)

DOWN

1	C(HAR)ITY (*rah* rev.)
2	RE(E)DS
3	BO(O)TH
4	R + AFT
5	AL(L + S)TAR
6	S(T)OWS
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11	HOT SEAT (anag.)
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THE ART WORLD

THE ELEGANT SCAVENGER

John Currin's low comedy of high style.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

JOHN CURRIN apologized for the drab surface of a new painting in his studio, on the westernmost block of Fourteenth Street—an area dominated by meatpackers which is rapidly artifying along with the gallery boom just to the north, in Chelsea. "I've been waiting to varnish it," the artist said. He plucked a brush from a can and made a few strokes on the canvas—a Northern Renaissance-looking picture of an anatomically impossible but convincingly naked young woman with a zany expression. Wet resin turned clayey oils pellucid. Colors—greenish-brown chiaroscuro background, pale peachy flesh with bluish insinuations—sang. I think I went, "Ah!"

This experience was a routine miracle of the art world before Impressionism sanctified raw paint. Insiders used to gather at a vernissage—the term literally means varnishing—to watch sullen textures combust under the artist's hand. It was a ritual transformation of private toil into public magic—or of matter into spirit, if one wanted to be moony about it. Proper moderns hated all that. Modern art was a battle among ideologies of "authenticity." In Currin's studio, I reflected that the demise of the ideologies is no longer just around the corner.

Currin is as important an emerging painter as today's art world provides. How important is that? Maybe not terribly, in the universalist terms that big-timers used to hanker after. But he is really something—and he is really something in New York, which for the last three decades has kept its status as the planet's top painting town more by default than otherwise. Currin does kitschy-looking, sneakily rigorous imaginary portraits, mostly of women, using a scrap heap of styles disdained by modern artists. There I was in a meatpacking district, seeing a brush touch a canvas and feeling that a large, if not overwhelming, significance hung on the act. Like a low-budget remake of a movie classic, the moment was sort of desultory, while hinting at superb bone structure.

Currin, who is thirty-six years old, is a tall, rangy guy with jutting features and the slightly louche air of a Midwestern kid from just this side of the wrong side of the tracks. He was born in Colorado into an Oklahoma family, he grew up in Northern California, and he earned a master-of-fine-arts degree from Yale. His artist heroes include a raffish uncle whose amateur paintings ran to "big-busted women and battleships." Currin's artistic stance belongs to a tradition of prairie, white-boy valor that looks macho from a distance and vulnerable up close. In him, the pattern shows up as part of a trend in painting that exalts some culturally renegade, acutely sexualized sensibilities.

Most of these newly eminent painters are women—including Elizabeth Peyton, whose intoxicating daubs praise languorous young men, and Lisa Yuskavage, a theatricalist of feminine angst. This puts Currin, whose images suggest misogyny, in an uncomfortable position that suits him well. His past lines of winsome, melon-breasted babes who seem sprung from vile old men's magazines and of randy, over-the-hill-divorcée types—in thickly painted, often unvarnished styles—were deliberately upsetting. Until two or three years ago, I abhorred the stuff as a public nuisance. Then I happened to look closely at it.

No one today makes more telling use of subtle painterly rhetoric than Currin does. The taut and tender concentration of his techniques—he tacitly talks shop with Old Masters from Vincent van Gogh to Lucas Cranach—reacts with the coarse comedy of his images to generate a rare ardor. The longer you look at a Currin, the less you know what to make of it. Finally, you com-

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mune directly with the permanent conundrums of painting—ambiguities of light and substance, depth and flatness, the works—on the awkward occasion of the artist's psychosexual hangups. Currin unites extremes of low-down grotesquerie and classical elegance.

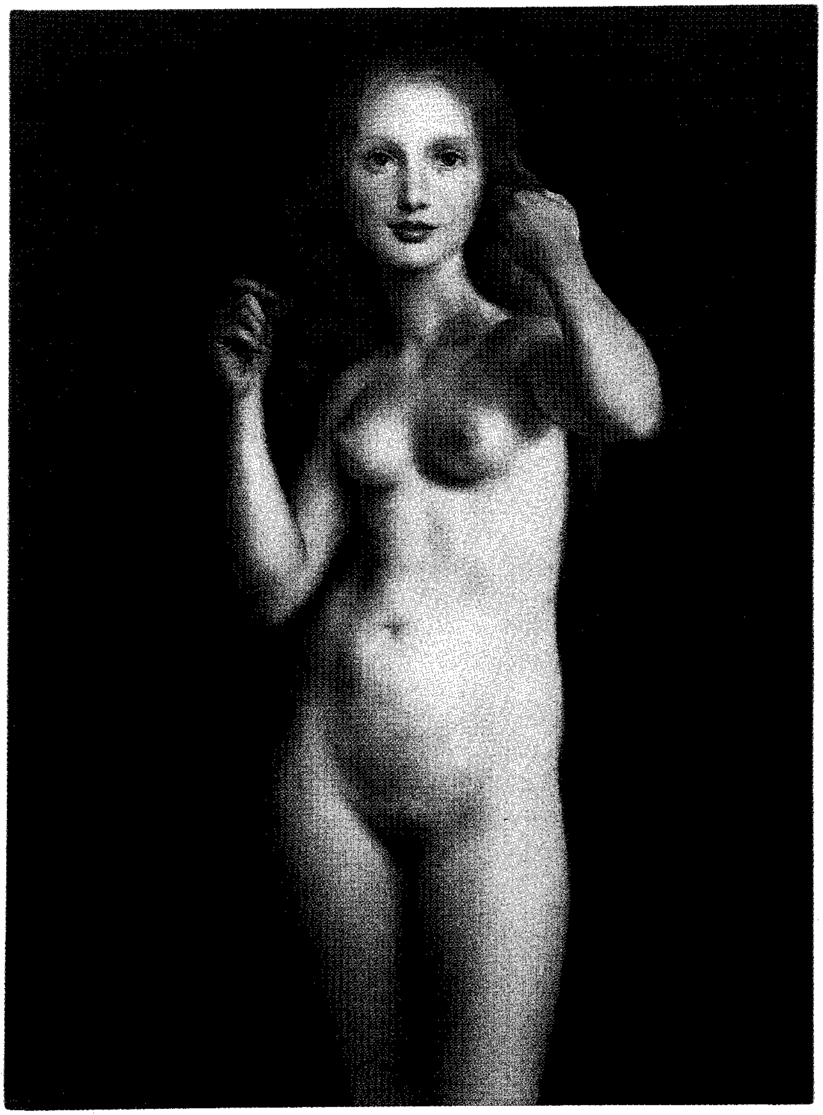
"I want *contrapposto* without looking Italian," Currin said to me of his nudes' expressively distorted Northern Rennaissance anatomies. (He also said, "I prefer the Germans, because they're smokier and scarier.") His figuration is so kinesthetically affecting that it takes a viewer time to notice that, say, a figure's right arm is roughly twice as long as her left one. Currin's women may be unreal (he never works from models and rarely from photographs), but they sure are *actual*. This art bursts upon our imagination before we can organize ourselves to keep it out.

CURRIN'S take on art history is so erudite and fresh that I was eager for his opinion of the newest Old Master in town. One afternoon we went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art's show of paintings by Dosso Dossi, a heretofore little-regarded Ferrarese Mannerist who made pastiches of Venetian styles—Giorgione, Titian—on arcane literary themes. Currin extolled the "pure goodness" of Dosso's love of painting, a quality that he found all the more cherishable for being handicapped by bad drawing and gawkily patchworked painterly affectations. "It's weird to see such good color in such awful art,“ he said appreciatively. "It's like Titian, only not intimidating." We marvelled together at the loftiness of the second-rate in cinquecento Italy.

Currin remarked that a painter learns much more from second-rate artists than from great ones. While we looked and talked, I had the sense that he was mentally breaking off pieces of Dosso's shakily integrated practices and storing them away for future use. Browsing in the Met's permanent collection, we shared the joyous frustration of trying to pick apart the enigmatic seamlessness of such masters as Rubens, Velázquez, and Rembrandt. "Just look at that," Currin said almost crossly as he pointed to the envelope of space under a hand in one of Rembrandt's portraits. "It's exact and indefinite. It's like pi—you can keep figuring it out and always be right and never be done." Similarly exasperated, he drew my attention to the uncanny nonchalance with which Rubens rendered preposterous imaginings—such as a fox attacking the hoof of a horse that is trampling it. "One of the life-goes-on details in Rubens," Currin said.

Finally, it was time for something perversely different. Currin led me to a painting that, in my thirty-six years in New York, I had never so much as glanced at. Hung dismissively high on a wall amid other debris of Italian eighteenth-century decadence, Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini's "Bacchus and Ariadne" presents its histrionic characters in blushing pastel hues. "Simpering mediocrity," Currin pronounced, with satisfaction. "Overwroughtness in spurious form." He beamed at the la-di-da Pellegrini. "See, he's making the figures demonstrate things that they have no right to demonstrate."

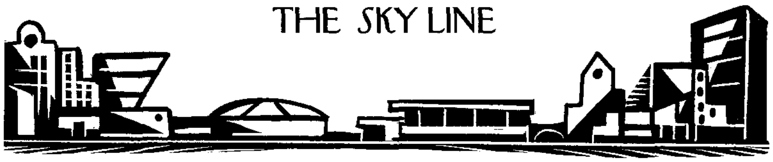
Currin's brand of artistic outlawry is very timely. Today's establishment loves art not wisely but too well. Art is administered by sentimentally celebratory institutions, snugged into niche markets of dauntingly efficient commerce, and paraded through auction houses as a kind of glorified funny money. In this context, to be frankly unlovable seems a prerequisite for meaning anything vital.



Currin's "Nude with Raised Arms" (1998): A painter, he says, learns much more from second-rate artists than from great ones.

COURTESY ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY

For Currin, it's not that old things—such as gleaming windowpanes of varnish or the use of the female nude to mirror male emotion—are new again. It's that "old" and "new" are exhausted categories. The past is present now. Dosso Dossi and John Currin are not contemporaries, but their paintings, inhabiting the same city at the same time, converse collegially. If the notion startles, it's because we are not accustomed to it yet; but we soon will be. ♦

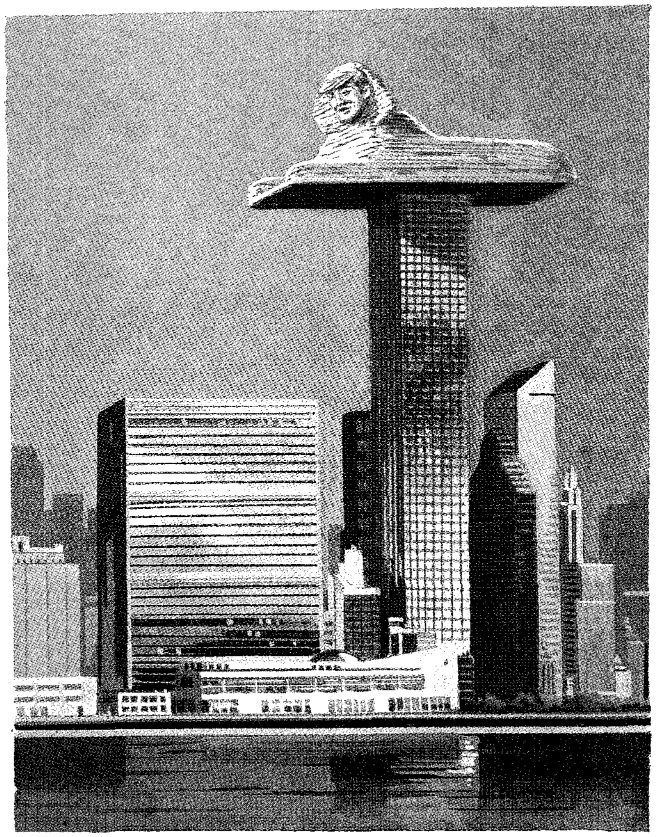


ZONE DEFENSE

Is Donald Trump unstoppable?

BY PAUL GOLDBERGER

In "The Towers of New York," a self-serving memoir written in 1937 by a once prominent and now forgotten builder named Louis Horowitz, there is a story about how a committee of rich and powerful New Yorkers tried to prevent the construction of the Equitable Building on lower Broadway. They wanted a park built on the site. "Such a place would make a lovely breathing spot that would brighten the lives of those who work in this congested region," the builder was told. Horowitz suggested that if the members of the committee, most of whom owned property adjacent to the site, felt so strongly about the beautification of the neighborhood they could buy the land and turn it into a park themselves. Needless to say, construction went ahead as planned. The Equitable Building, which was completed in 1915, rose thirty-nine stories and stretched the length of an entire block. It was the largest office building in the world, and its enormous bulk provoked such a loud public outcry that the city passed zoning laws to prevent anything like it being built again. They were the first such laws in the nation.



Trump's newest project, a tower overlooking the U.N., will be more than thirty stories higher than the Secretariat.

Louis Horowitz got rich putting up buildings in this city, some of which, like the Woolworth Building, are still prominent landmarks. In his memoir, he boasts of having willed the New York skyline into existence. It's unlikely that Donald Trump has ever heard of Horowitz, but the similarities between the two men are obvious. Trump's memoirs make the same sorts of claims. And Trump's newest project, an apartment tower that he intends to build on the west side of First Avenue between Forty-seventh and Forty-eighth Streets, sounds a lot like the Equitable Building must have sounded in the early part of the century. He calls his new building Trump World Tower, and says that it will be ninety stories high, and the world's tallest residential structure. (In fact, the plans call for seventy-two stories. Trump, like many other developers, numbers the floors of his buildings somewhat impressionistically. Numbers are skipped here and there to make the top floors sound loftier.) In any case, the new building as planned would be eight hundred and sixty-one feet high, nearly twice the size of anything nearby. It would loom imposingly over the United Nations Secretariat building across the street, which has been the tallest building in the area for close to fifty years.

As with the Equitable Building, the most vocal opposition to the project comes from people who are its close neighbors—people like Walter Cronkite and Seymour Flug, the founder of the Diners Club, and the architectural historian Victoria Newhouse. They live in smaller towers near Trump's site, and they don't want a monstrosity on top of them. They've assembled a substantial war chest to fight it, although it is uncertain that they will have any greater success than the Equitable's neighbors did. There's no law against building such a building, or so Trump and his lawyers say. At least not yet. Trump told the *Times* a few months ago that once the city discovered what he was doing it would undoubtedly figure out a way to make sure that no one pulled off such a stunt again.

Trump seems to be getting away with more than anyone has got away with in New York since, well, since the Equitable, and I think he would consider that a compliment. It takes a certain vision and a great deal of confidence to manipulate the system as cleverly as Trump does. Building is tightly regulated in New York, and fooling around with air rights and finding loopholes in zoning laws is no small feat. He made this point to me a few days ago, when I got a tour of his most recent projects. We were headed for the Trump World Tower, but he asked me to meet him farther uptown first, at 610 Park Avenue, the former Mayfair Regent Hotel, which he recently renovated into luxury condominiums. There are elegantly carved limestone columns in the lobby, which Trump felt proved that he could "do the traditional sort of stuff, too." He added that he loved "the modernism, but I guess you could say I'm ambidextrous. It is a very different architecture from Trump World Tower, but people love it."

Twenty blocks downtown, at the sales center for the new

BRUCE McCALL

building on First Avenue, Trump showed me a small model that demonstrates how the building relates to its neighbors. The sales center also has a larger model, which lights up and rotates, and a theatre, where prospective residents can watch a seven-minute promotional video, the highlight of which is footage of Trump circling the site in his helicopter, with Frank Sinatra singing "New York, New York" in the background. "They get out of that and they say, 'Where do I sign?' " Trump said. "People love it."

Trump likes the little model, because he can use it to show exactly what he did to secure permission to build an eight-hundred-and-sixty-one-foot megatower that will dominate the area around the United Nations. "I bought this, and this, and this, and then the church and the Japan Society," he said, pointing to the models of all the little buildings on the block. He was referring, of course, to the development rights above the buildings, not to the buildings themselves. "I think there were twelve transactions altogether," he said. The only thing that displeased him in the model was the tall building that is closest to his own, 100 United Nations Plaza, which is fifty-five stories tall. "Now, here are the people who are complaining, and that's an awful building that they live in," he said. "It was built with air rights, and it blocked views for other people. Those people bought there to get views of the U.N.—so I tell them that now the only thing they can do is move to my building." (Actually, the most prominent opponents of Trump's project live at 860 and 870 United Nations Plaza, on the other side of First Avenue, which are also, in Trump's opinion, pretty lousy buildings.)

Air rights, or development rights—which could be defined as the difference between the bulk of a small building on a particular site and the larger building that could legally be allowed on that site—are often transferred from one building to another, allowing, say, a skyscraper next to a church to be taller than it might otherwise have been. In New York City, these rights are usually transferred only to neighboring properties, and cannot be transferred across the lines that separate zoning districts. To accumulate enough air rights to build his tower, Trump bought the air rights from several buildings in a single interlocking chain of adjacent properties, then transferred the rights to the site of his new building, which straddles two districts. The Department of Buildings ruled that the transfer was legal because the two districts allow the same density. It said, in effect, that Trump could move the air rights across the district line because the rules were the same on both sides.

The Department of Buildings—not the City Planning Commission, as is popularly believed—is the operational authority on zoning in New York. The Planning Commission writes the zoning laws, but the Department of Buildings decides how the laws are to be interpreted, and in the case of Trump's most recent deal the interpretation was somewhat unorthodox. Donald H. Elliott represents the citizens' group that has led the opposition to the Trump project, and he insists that the Buildings Department is wrong. Elliott, who was once the chairman of the City Planning Commission, wrote a seven-page letter to Gaston Silva, the Commissioner of Buildings, arguing that Trump's building permit should be revoked.

The city's zoning ordinances are so complicated—"This stuff really is in Sanskrit," Elliott says—that, like tax laws, they can be interpreted in different ways by different people. And, just as clever lawyers outmaneuver the bureaucrats of the I.R.S. on behalf of their clients, so lawyers with expertise in zoning often manage to convince the Buildings Department of the correctness of their position. Trump was represented by Samuel H. Lindenbaum, who is generally considered the dean of lawyers specializing in zoning regulations. Lindenbaum says that he met with officials of the Buildings Department in the middle of 1997 to discuss the First Avenue site on behalf of Howard Ronson, a British developer, and convinced the city that the air rights were transferrable. Shortly after this, Ronson decided not to take the property after all, and Trump bought it and suggested that even more air rights could be acquired from adjacent properties. Lindenbaum went back to the Buildings Department and got a second O.K. He persuaded the department to grant a permit without holding public hearings or having the City Planning Commission evaluate the project. The Planning Commission gets involved only when builders request variances of

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the zoning laws, and Lindenbaum took the position that no variance was necessary, since existing laws permitted the building as a matter of course.

DONALD TRUMP has been denounced as greedy, selfish, indifferent to good urban design, and sly as a fox. Every word of that is true, of course. But what of it? If the city's skyline had been built only by people who were guided primarily by the rules of good planning, New York would be the size of Bronxville. Trump is doing nothing that builders haven't done in Manhattan for generations. It is what you might call the George Washington Plunkett school of urban planning: Trump seen his opportunities and he took 'em.

New York Paper
M.

Trump all but disappeared from the development scene in the early nineties, when his financial troubles, along with the New York recession, brought his work here to a halt, but he seems to be all over the place now: at the huge residential development along the Hudson River where the rail yards used to be; in midtown, where he is redesigning the widely despised plaza at the General Motors Building; in lower Manhattan, where he has redone the 40 Wall Street skyscraper; at the United Nations; and at Columbus Circle, where he is pushing hard for the right to tear down the most famous building there—the bizarre marble confection on the south side that was designed in the sixties by Edward Durell Stone for Huntington Hartford as a sort of anti-Museum of Modern Art. It was later turned into the New York Cultural Center. If Trump were to secure that site, he could build a companion piece to the Trump International Hotel and Tower, on the north side of the circle, the quickie remake of the old Gulf & Western Building by Philip Johnson, who stripped off the original ugly glass skin and replaced it with a new, slightly less ugly glass skin.

Last year, Trump failed to win the biggest development prize on Columbus Circle: the right to replace the aging Coliseum with a new skyscraper. If he manages to capture the Cultural Center building, he will have surrounded the Coliseum, and he may well see that as a way to make up for his failure to acquire it. Planners and preservationists are torn, to say the least, over what should happen to the old Cultural Center. Nobody much admires the building, with its portholes and its spindly columns, but it has a certain quirky charm, and for more than thirty years it has defined Columbus Circle more successfully than the statue of Christopher Columbus in the circle's center. The city owns the building but no longer uses it, and wants to sell it. The Dahesh Museum, a small collection now based in rented space on Fifth Avenue, has offered to buy the building, and there are reports that the Calder Foundation has expressed interest in acquiring it to house some of Alexander Calder's work. Either one of those organizations could satisfy the landmark preservationists who treasure it as a relic of nineteen-sixties idiosyncrasy. But it's unlikely that either institution would pay the city as much to use the building as Trump would to tear it down.

TRUMP'S presence is much less tentative on the far West Side, where he has just completed two new buildings, a forty-story rental tower and a forty-six-story condominium. These are the first, and so far only, elements of a much larger project called Riverside South, which is intended to cover the site of the former Penn Central rail yards along the Hudson River between Fifty-ninth and Seventy-second Streets. Trump has controlled the land since the mid-nineteen-eighties, and at first he tried to erect the world's tallest skyscraper there, but he was the only one who liked the idea. Riverside South was actually an alternative plan created by a coalition of civic groups led by the Municipal Art Society. When Trump realized that the alternative would fly and his scheme wouldn't, he made Riverside South his own.

So powerful is Trump's name that the plan's origin in the conference rooms of do-good civic groups was quickly forgotten, as was the fact that Trump's decision to build it was less a victory for him than a capitulation. Before the first brick was laid, Riverside South was attacked as huge and exploitative, like most other Trump projects. In an extraordinary irony, Representative Jerrold Nadler managed to block federal funds for one of the key aspects of the Riverside South plan: developing a public park along the river by relocating the elevated stretch of the West Side Highway that runs in front of the project. It would seem that Nadler didn't like the notion that federal highway money might help Donald Trump even indirectly. Thus a highway will run over the middle of the park simply because Nadler was unwilling to accept the accident of history that put Trump on the side of the angels.

The master plan for Riverside South, which was designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, calls for tall towers facing the river and lower buildings on side streets, loosely replicating the classic Manhattan formula. This was what brought Battery Park City, in lower Manhattan, considerable acclaim in the early eighties. The two buildings that have gone up already—the pair of immense high-rises, with apartments designed by Costas Kondylis and façades by Philip Johnson—try to mimic New York architecture of the twenties and thirties. They are a far cry from the reflective-glass glitz of Trump's early years (which still, by every indication, comes closest to his architectural taste), but they are too glib and too big to be convincing. It's one thing to admire the charm of Manhattan buildings of the twenties; it's quite another to believe that you can replicate them at twice the size.

The relationship between Philip Johnson, who is still working at ninety-two, and Trump is complicated. It was clearly a marriage of convenience—Johnson got to keep busy, and Trump got a famous name to sign his buildings. When Johnson expressed reservations recently about the execution of his designs for Riverside South, implying that Trump's financial partners had forced him to make alterations, Trump was furious. There's nothing he resents more than the suggestion that he lacks total control over his projects. "What was Philip thinking?" Trump said to me. "I gave him all this work, and I revived him. Everybody knows Trump International Hotel and Riverside South are great buildings. I tell you, people love them." (Johnson has since retracted his criticism.)

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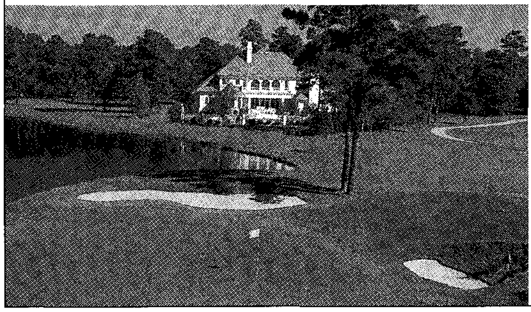

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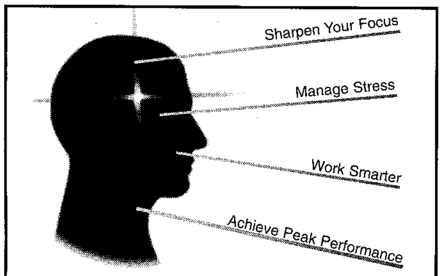

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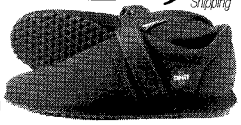

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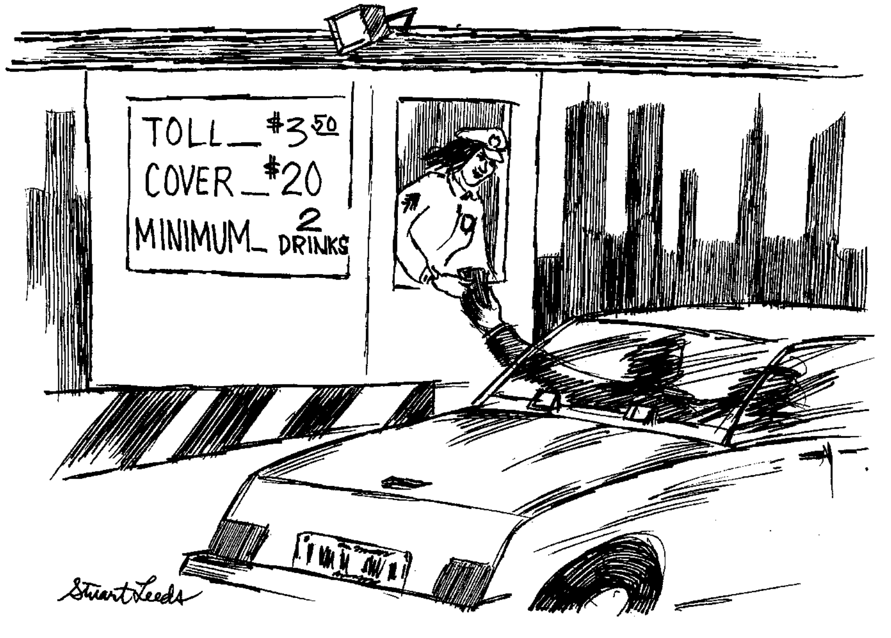
tas Kondylis, the building has the un-Trumpian virtue of simplicity, but a lot will depend on the choice of color for the glass, and how it appears in the morning light coming off the East River and the afternoon light reflecting across Manhattan. At its best, the building will look like two Olympic Towers, one piled on top of the other. If it is not quite the Seagram Building, it does not seem to be hopelessly vulgar, either. But the ads for the building suggest that the glass may turn out to be closer to the golden-hued stuff used in one of Trump's Atlantic City casinos. Trump is aware of that, and it makes him nervous, since he is trying to position the building as upscale and dignified, which means dark. When we were in the sales office, he told an assistant to replace a large photo display that made the building look a little too golden. "I will, Donald," she said, "but you have to know that the people who see it—they love it."

City officials have said little about the Trump building, and Mayor Giuliani, who has been quite supportive of large-scale development, has stayed pretty much on the sidelines. The Mayor does not seem particularly troubled by an aspect of the project that bothers everyone else: the way in which it overpowers the United Nations.

The city has always been somewhat ambivalent about the United Nations. After the seventeen-acre site on which it was to be built was purchased from William Zeckendorf in 1946, a short tunnel was created under First Avenue to reduce traffic congestion and a platform was constructed over the F.D.R. Drive to allow the complex to jut into the East River. A stretch of First Avenue was renamed United Nations Plaza, but attempts to do more than that met with confusion, and even outright hostility. Robert Moses agreed to widen Forty-seventh Street to create an open vista toward what was to have been the Secretariat building, but when the U.N.'s architects decided to move the building to the south end of the site, Moses said that it was too late to change his plans. The expanded street now offers nothing more than a distant view of Queens—although it will provide a formal concourse for Trump World Tower.

Several other ambitious redevelopment proposals never got off the drawing board. They didn't stand a chance, of course, since New York would never reorganize midtown Manhattan around the United Nations. The city doesn't turn itself upside down for anything; that is its great strength as well as its weakness. No commercial builder has taken into consideration the presence of the United Nations complex since 1947, when Zeckendorf tried to build a formal allée of towers leading from Third Avenue to the U.N. With the exception of the twin glass towers of 860 and 870 United Nations Plaza, designed by Harrison, Abramovitz & Harris in 1966, and the two elegantly shaped late-modern glass skyscrapers designed by Kevin Roche for the United Nations Development Corporation, most of the architecture in the



neighborhood could have been put up anywhere.

Until Trump's project, nothing in the immediate vicinity challenged the U.N. for supremacy of the East River skyline. (Kevin Roche tried, but was told by the Lindsay administration to adjust the plans for his tower so that it would be shorter than the Secretariat.) But Trump is dealing with a mayor who has been openly hostile to the United Nations. Giuliani's complaints about such things as diplomatic immunity to parking regulations have provided a climate that must be encouraging to Trump. He is pushing the neighbors around mainly because, as the cowboy of New York real estate, he doesn't know any other way to operate and thinks he can get away with it. But it doesn't hurt that he has a mayor who likes to engage in a little U.N.-bashing himself.

Before Trump's opponents on First Avenue go to court about this, they have one recourse, assuming that the Buildings Commissioner rejects Donald Elliott's request that Trump's building permit be revoked. Their next stop is a city agency called the Board of Standards and Appeals, which usually tends to agree with the Buildings Department, although in 1989 it ruled that approval should not have been granted for a tall tower on Ninety-sixth Street east of Park Avenue, and ordered the developer to remove several upper floors. The Ninety-sixth Street building, a banal thing in itself, has come to have great symbolic importance in urban-planning circles, since it is one of the few cases in which local protesters got something removed after it was finished.

Elliott knows that getting Trump's permit revoked is unlikely, and that he will probably end up in court. Trump says that there is no way his neighbors can stop him. Demolition has begun on the site, and ground-breaking is scheduled for next month. A few days after we visited the Trump World Tower sales office, he called from Branson, Missouri, where he had gone to observe the Miss U.S.A. beauty pageant, and I asked him about the opposition. "The banks have put up three hundred and sixty million dollars based on the city issuing me a permit," he said. "The city has given me the absolute right to build that building, and I am totally convinced that it will be built." ♦

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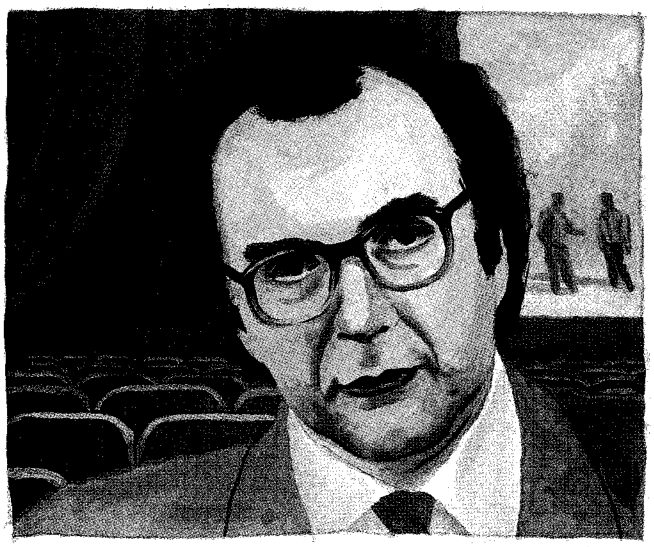
NOBODY'S DARLING

Fascism and the drama of human connection in "Ashes to Ashes."

BY JOHN LAHR

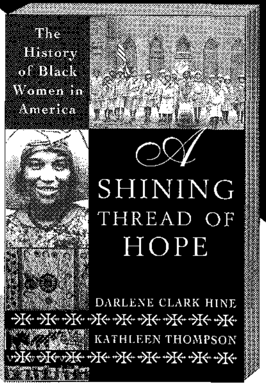


Intimate, disturbing conversation: Pinter, at sixty-eight, writes with distilled elegance about the gulf between people.

GERARD NICOLAS

"THE dead are still looking at us, steadily, waiting for us to acknowledge our part in their murder," Harold Pinter wrote in the *Guardian,* in December, 1996, just two months after the rocky début of his gnarly, brilliant play "Ashes to Ashes." This eerie state of hauntedness is dramatized in the character of Rebecca, a nervy middle-class woman who is thrilled and appalled by images of Nazi Germany—images so alive to her that she exists in an altered reality. It has taken three years for the short play—it runs a mere forty minutes—to cross the Atlantic, but the wait has been worth it. Although Lindsay Duncan, who originated the part of Rebecca in the West End, stars again in the role at the Roundabout's annex at the Gramercy Theatre, nothing in Karel Reisz's penetrating production is the same, not even Duncan's transfixing interpretation. Here, on a steeply raked stage that seems to spill the character's perverse inner world into the audience's lap, Reisz has used the skills of the set designer Tony Walton to humanize Rebecca and her donnish partner, Devlin (David Strathairn), who is trying to fathom her as she slips in and out of sadomasochistic reverie. In Walton's set, beautifully lit by Richard Pilbrow, there is a feeling of texture and warmth which establishes the characters as people who have made a life together—a feeling that was completely absent from the austere chrome-and-leather environment of the original London production, which Pinter himself directed. In this living room, there are books, a large blue-and-beige floral carpet, velvety brown armchairs. Outside, through latticed windows, we glimpse a manicured English garden in full flower—evidence of Rebecca's "green fingers" and of the comforting sense of order which also prevails inside the house. The stage-managed equanimity serves to magnify the horror of the fascist state of mind which the play explores.

As Pinter gets older (he's sixty-eight), his plays get shorter and more abstract—epiphanies both of grief and of the gulf between people. Though "Ashes to Ashes," along with his latest full-length play, "Moonlight," may lack the rigorous, often comic exposition of his great early works, like "The Homecoming" and "The Caretaker," these distilled newer plays are not far behind in their spooked resonance. "Ashes to Ashes" throws the audience immediately into the middle of an intimate, disturbing conversation: there are no explanations of what has come before



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or what will come after, just a mysterious moment that will be perpetually reinvented and expanded by the characters as the play unfolds. The audience is submerged in the moment, too, as in a kind of dream; and, as with a dream, you make sense of its events retrospectively. Duncan, with her translucent skin and her strawberry-blond hair, seems wraithlike and fragile as she sits in open-toed tan mules attempting, in her butterscotch voice, to explain the erotic charge of submitting to tyrannical power: "He would stand over me and clench his fist. And then he'd put his other hand on my neck and grip it and bring my head towards him. His fist... grazed my mouth. And he'd say, 'Kiss my fist.'" Duncan, a most masterful actress, hardly moves a muscle; she makes the frisson palpable in the way the memory fills her face. "I said, 'Put your hand round my throat,'" she says. "I murmured it through his hand as I was kissing it." Later, Rebecca describes her lover putting his hands on her throat "very gently, very gently, so gently." She adds, "He adored me, you see." Her "most precious companion" is, in her job description of him, a "guide"; in this case, he guides people to their death. "I watched him walk down the platform and tear all the babies from the arms of their screaming mothers," she says.

The sound of a passing police siren, an elegant Reisz touch that precedes the couple's first exchange, makes Rebecca feel "terribly insecure"; in her daylight life it seems to signal the retreat of moral law. In the face of Devlin's pompous incredulity at another horrific memory, she tries to explain how the acceptance of little bits of evil in the community can metastasize into something virulent and engulfing—a kind of "mental elephantiasis." Her outrage at the psychic numbing that comes in the wake of atrocity turns Pinter's frequently stated political point into powerful stage poetry. "When you spill an ounce of gravy, for example, it expands and immediately becomes a vast sea of gravy," she tells Devlin. "It becomes a sea of gravy which surrounds you on all sides and you suffocate in a voluminous sea of gravy." She goes on, "You are not the *victim* of it, you are the *cause* of it. Because it was you who spilt the gravy in the first place."

Over the course of the evening, as Devlin (invested with wry academic irony by Strathairn) tries to draw Rebecca out, the barbarity that obsesses her seems to be a refraction of a kind of unacknowledged violence lurking in their terse exchanges. There is some relation, I think, between the moral vacuum Rebecca is consumed by and the emotional emptiness in the couple's badinage. This dynamic, where a relationship is dramatized as the perpetual play of approximate understanding, seems to me an important and tragic vision of human connection. At one point, Devlin calls Rebecca "darling." She replies, "No one has ever called me darling. Apart from my lover"—a comeback that allows no opposition. She adds, "Well I don't want to be your darling. It's the last thing I want to be. I'm nobody's darling." Rebecca's mind percolates with images of annihilation—abandoned babies, screaming mothers, people being walked into the sea ("The tide covered them slowly. Their bags bobbed about in the waves"). She is both torturing herself out of survivor guilt ("I have never suffered. Nor have my friends") and torturing her companion, who is competing in vain with her ravishing figments.

At the chilling finale, Devlin, whether out of jealousy or in an attempt to jolt Rebecca back to reality, tries to force his way into her imagination. "Kiss my fist," he says, standing over her. "Speak. Say it. Say 'Put your hand round my throat.'" Rebecca does not speak or move. It's a terrible but terrific moment of isolation. When she finally speaks again, her words echo, as if—like the police siren—she were moving farther and farther away from herself. Here, as Rebecca engages a fantasy of a mother surrendering her child, the "baby" becomes "the bundle"—the human entity semantically transformed into a disposable nonentity. Rebecca tells of coming to the end of her journey and meeting a woman she once knew: "And she said what happened to your baby... Where is your baby... And I said what baby... I don't have a baby... I don't know of any baby." It's impossible to explain why the impact of these words is so devastating. Rebecca, who has confessed to the thrill of submitting to power, now imposes her emptiness on others, and the circuit of depersonalization seems complete. She has always carried the victim inside her; what Pinter dares to show in the play's last beat is that she also carries the victimizer. ♦

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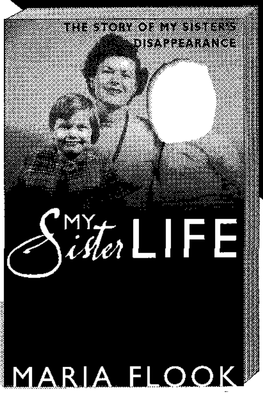

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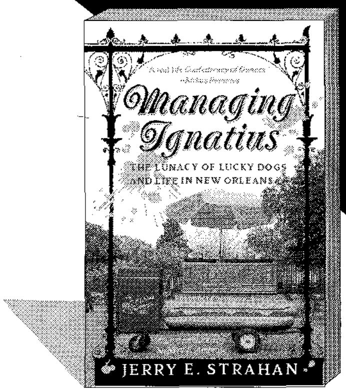

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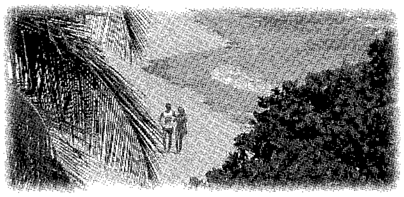

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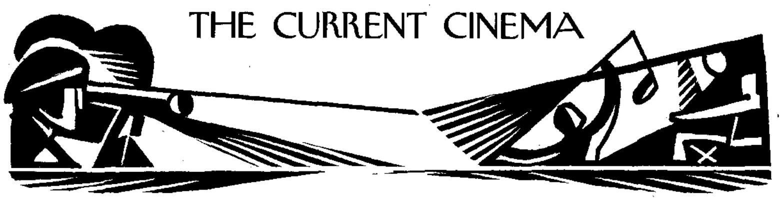


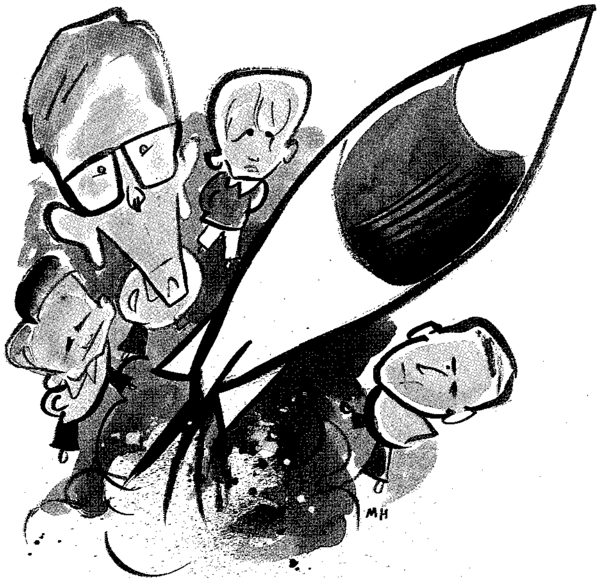
THE CURRENT CINEMA

POPULAR MECHANICS

A coal town's fifties poetry, and a bottled romance.

BY DAVID DENBY

IN some moods, I could sit contentedly watching the California surf roll in behind a bunch of stupid actors. The movies, thank God, are a photographic medium, and at times the sight of the ocean, or rusted steel and bent tin, or some empty woods, threadbare in winter, can do wonders to anchor a story in the Whitmanesque glory of the sordid and beautiful world. We want much more from a movie than mere physical reality, but a movie that at least gives us *that* can get away with a lot. "October Sky" is an inspirational story of a fairly conventional sort—four boys stuck in a West Virginia coal town in 1957 begin playing around with rockets and compete for a science prize—and in careless hands it might not have amounted to much. But the film, directed by Joe Johnston, was shot in scraggly parts of Tennessee, including Knoxville (substituting for Coalwood, West Virginia), and everything looks right: the skies are gray, and a wrought-iron tipple sits at the mouth of the mine like a gallows. Down below, the men have to walk bent over to reach the coal face. From these dispiriting bits of physical life the emotions of the story—wild hopes of adventure and flight—jump out like shooting stars. "October Sky" is borderline corny, but I was held by it; I was even moved by it.



Before rebellion was commercialized: the homemade rockets in "October Sky" are a model of amateur enterprise.

MARCELLUS HALL

The picture is based on "Rocket Boys," a recent autobiographical memoir by Homer Hickam, Jr., a retired NASA engineer. As the movie tells it, almost no one in rural West Virginia in the late fifties goes to college; no one is *supposed* to go, except, perhaps, on a football scholarship. The boys, no matter how bright, are expected to graduate from high school and go down into the mine. Dangerous and not all that productive, the mine has nevertheless kept the town alive for generations, and, for the young men, sacrificing themselves to its depths has an almost moral majesty—the act is enshrined as proper in the eyes of their elders. Mysteriously, one of the boys, the seventeen-year-old Homer Hickam (Jake Gyllenhaal), thinks he can escape. The Russians have just sent up Sputnik, and in the atmosphere of wonder and alarm which envelops the town—people gather at night to watch the satellite cross the sky—Homer recruits a few friends and, with the help of a sympathetic science teacher (Laura Dern), begins to build little rockets.

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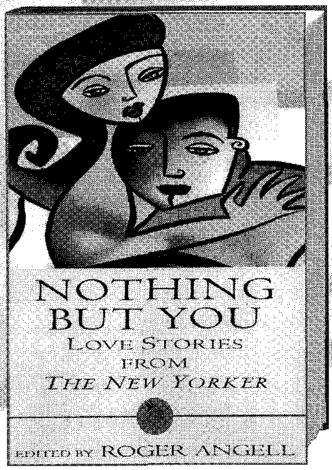

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It's a virtue of the screenplay, by Lewis Colick, that the chief impediment to Homer's ambitions is someone he loves, someone entirely worthy. John Hickam (Chris Cooper), the superintendent of the mine, is the kind of father who fills a boy with pride and crushes him at the same time. Joe is an utterly responsible man. When he's home, or in his office, he's alive to the tremors below; he's always rushing off to rescue someone from disaster. Chris Cooper, from "Lone Star," has a serious brow, a serious body, and serious hair. He's not a great actor (his expression is too unvaried), but he's leathery, strong, and dignified, and his face could strike even Jay Leno dumb; one feels that anything said in his presence had better be important. He's the most impressive and discouraging physical object in Coalwood, and his frowns and silences mean only one thing—that his son Homer must follow him down the shaft.

Joe Johnston began his career designing special effects for the "Star Wars" series, and he has a feeling for the cranky wit and eccentric life of machines. The boys build the rockets out of borrowed or stolen spare parts; they find a launch site on a slag heap outside town; and they fire up the rockets, which then go every which way. Some go whirlybirding around in circles, some explode, some fizzle and fall, some boomerang onto the boys, who have to dive for cover. And some, finally, go straight up; when that happens, Johnston, imitating Spielberg, makes the awestruck spectators rise into the frame, mouths open, eyes wide. Johnston shares with Spielberg a sense of the redemptive value of American squareness: the soaring little rockets become the poetry of a depressed community.

The movie is set at a nodal point in postwar life. The Platters, the Coasters, Buddy Holly, and Elvis are playing everywhere; a new pop culture is taking over, just as a new technology is replacing the old industrial dispensation of coal and steel. In a few years, everything will change, but in 1957 the boys remain a model of amateur enterprise—they have no computers at their disposal, and their quest is methodical and deglamorized in a machine-shop, *Popular Mechanics* sort of way. There is, at times, a boy's-book simplicity to

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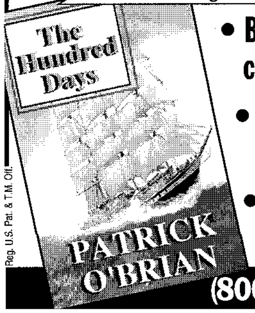

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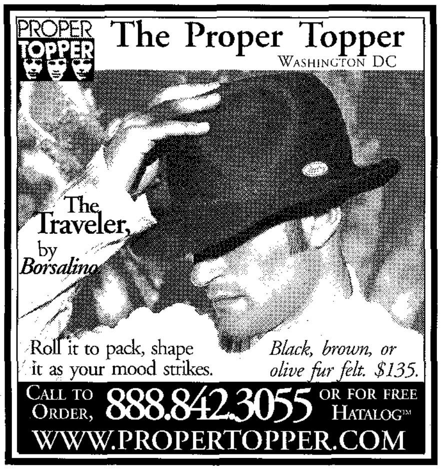

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"October Sky." Laura Dern's science teacher is idealized, and the girls are there either to support or to betray the hero. I could have done without a scene in which the boys raise a flag in imitation of the famous flag-raising on Iwo Jima. But the period settings take the shine off the material, and that's what saves "October Sky." The brownish color makes the movie look like a series of *Saturday Evening Post* illustrations, and the boys, earnest and unknowing, dressed in drab mail-order clothes, are certainly of the old style; their rebellion hasn't yet been commercialized and turned into a fashion statement. It seems right that they aren't very interested in girls. The movie is openly a portrait of impacted and sublimated male sexuality. Johnston doesn't emphasize the point, since everyone will get it anyway: the rockets, taking off, are more powerful than sex.

AFTER my declaration of pleasure in rolling surf, I have to add that all the chic desolate beaches in the world couldn't save "Message in a Bottle" from being what it is—slop made palatable by the application of sombre good taste. Robin Wright Penn plays a Chicago newspaperwoman whose husband has left her and who is blocked as a writer. On a Cape Cod vacation, she picks up a bottle containing a letter in which a man apologizes fervently for not taking better care of his wife. She tracks down other bottled messages from this mournful-moony romantic, who is apparently dotting the seven seas with his remorse. Then she looks him up. He turns out to be a builder of beautiful sailboats who refuses to build any more, and he is Kevin Costner in retreat—withdrawn, surly, but shining with inner nobility. Kevin's dead wife was an artist; he was not able to keep her alive, despite carrying her around in his arms a great deal, and now he makes a shrine out of her studio, wincing when Robin inadvertently moves an old palette from its hallowed place. (Judith Anderson did a better job protecting her dead mistress's hairbrushes in "Rebecca.")

"Message in a Bottle," from an excruciating best-seller by Nicholas Sparks, is terrible, and it didn't have to be. The genre of hyperemotional "women's films," after all, once yielded some good, even entrancing movies, starring Barbara Stanwyck, Joan Crawford, and Bette Davis, and could do so again, if someone would make them with conviction. But "Message in a Bottle," which was directed by Luis Mandoki, just feels moldy, as if the romantic clichés had also been kept in a bottle. Costner and Robin Wright Penn begin an affair, but it's on the tame and nuzzling side. Lying in each other's arms on the deck of his boat or, while leaning on driftwood, in front of a campfire, they resemble nothing so much as the impersonally handsome models in an ad for expensive sweaters. Can Costner love again? Can *she*? The man or woman who has to be "coaxed" back into love is a familiar trope of romance fiction—there's no seduction without resistance—but these two don't have the sensual volatility to play such roles. Robin Wright Penn is merely nervous, and after a while one's heart goes out to her. As she flutters, and stares, and looks away, Costner gives her nothing—he just stands there, taciturn and distant. He's supposed to be scarred by experience, but actually he seems unmarked by anything but a peculiarly passive vanity. It's as if he thought he could maintain himself as a movie star by doing as little as possible. His performance is insulting; "Message in a Bottle" is insulting, too. This tepid love affair, we're meant to believe, brings these two back to life. Kevin begins building beautiful boats again, and Robin writes human-interest stories for her Chicago paper. The movie is somehow both shameless and genteel, a combination that could well make it a success. Anything more vigorous might not leave people sighing over its refined longings and stifled sorrows. ♦

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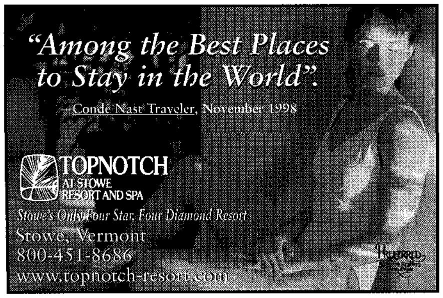

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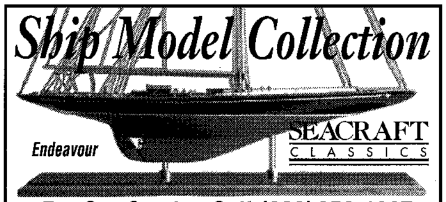

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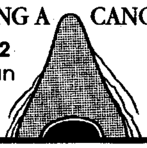

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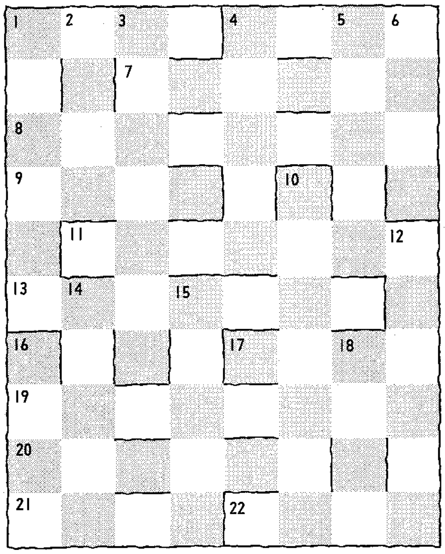

ACROSS

- 1 Crazy joke on Manhattan's center (4)
- 4 Overheard crowd for Mets or Knicks (4)
- 7 A survey operator for a Harlem theater (6)
- 8 Trash line in Grand Central Station (5,3)
- 9 The lady's taste of Broadway seasoning (4)
- 11 Sneer at bum closest by (7)
- 13 They light some Madison Square Garden events (7)
- 17 Spring at back of Brooklyn bridge (4)
- 19 Amiable drunk naps late (8)
- 20 Beaten Giants getting their fill? (6)
- 21 School in Village, to neighbors (4)
- 22 Look for waterfront area in the sound (4)

DOWN

- 1 New York City acquired deli meat (6)
- 2 Changed Shea Stadium's name (4)
- 3 Tabloid turned up heartless rents for little rooms (7)
- 4 Someone pulling for skyscraper (5)
- 5 Grads renovated a slum (5)
- 6 Spot Mr. Wolfe around Carnegie's rear (4)
- 10 Look at part of the *Times* for leak (7)
- 12 Person camping in Staten terminal (6)
- 14 Key for an apartment (1,4)
- 15 Gab about Apple's first line of stores (5)
- 16 Ape's loose somewhere in St. Patrick's Cathedral (4)
- 18 Something staked in urban tenements (4)

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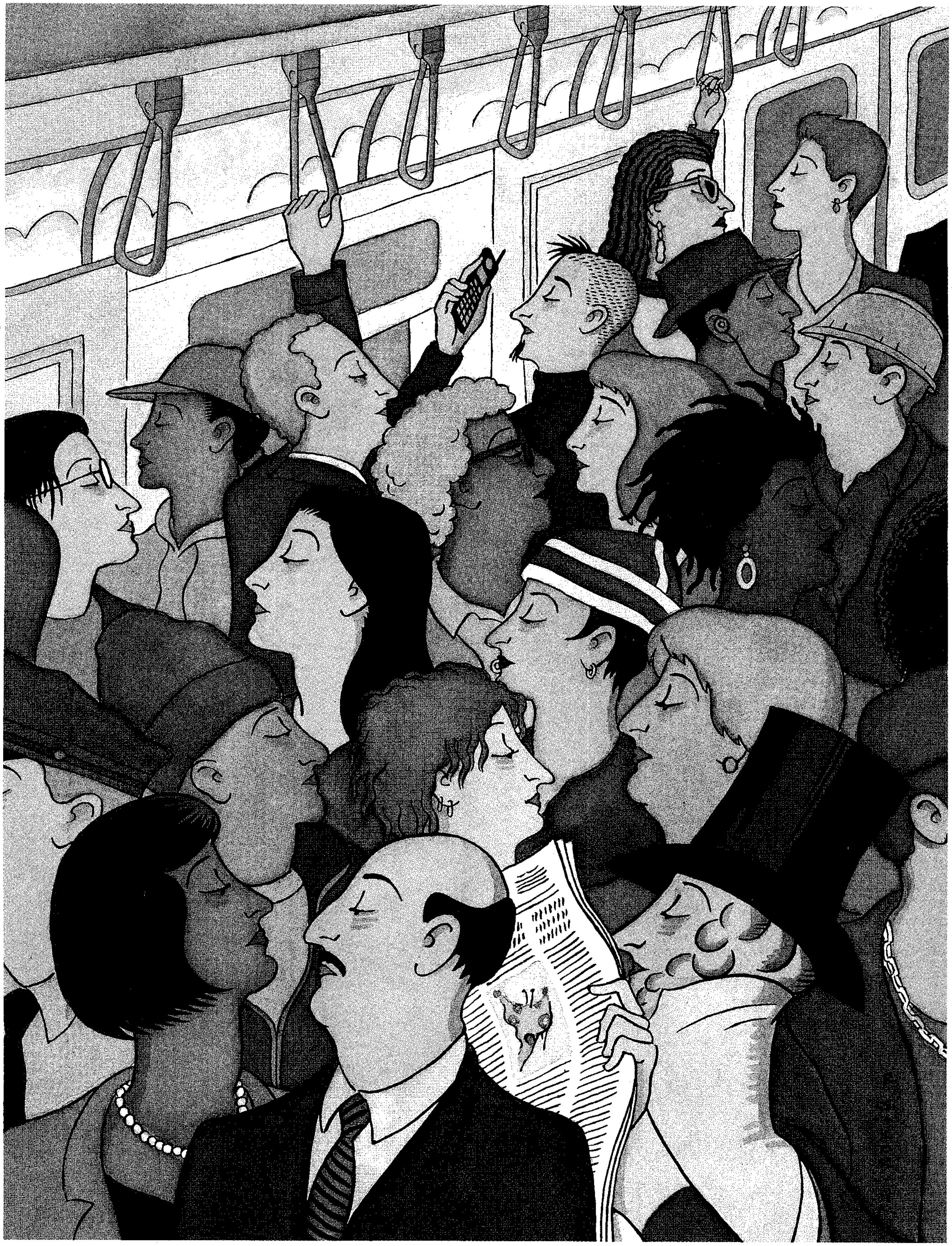

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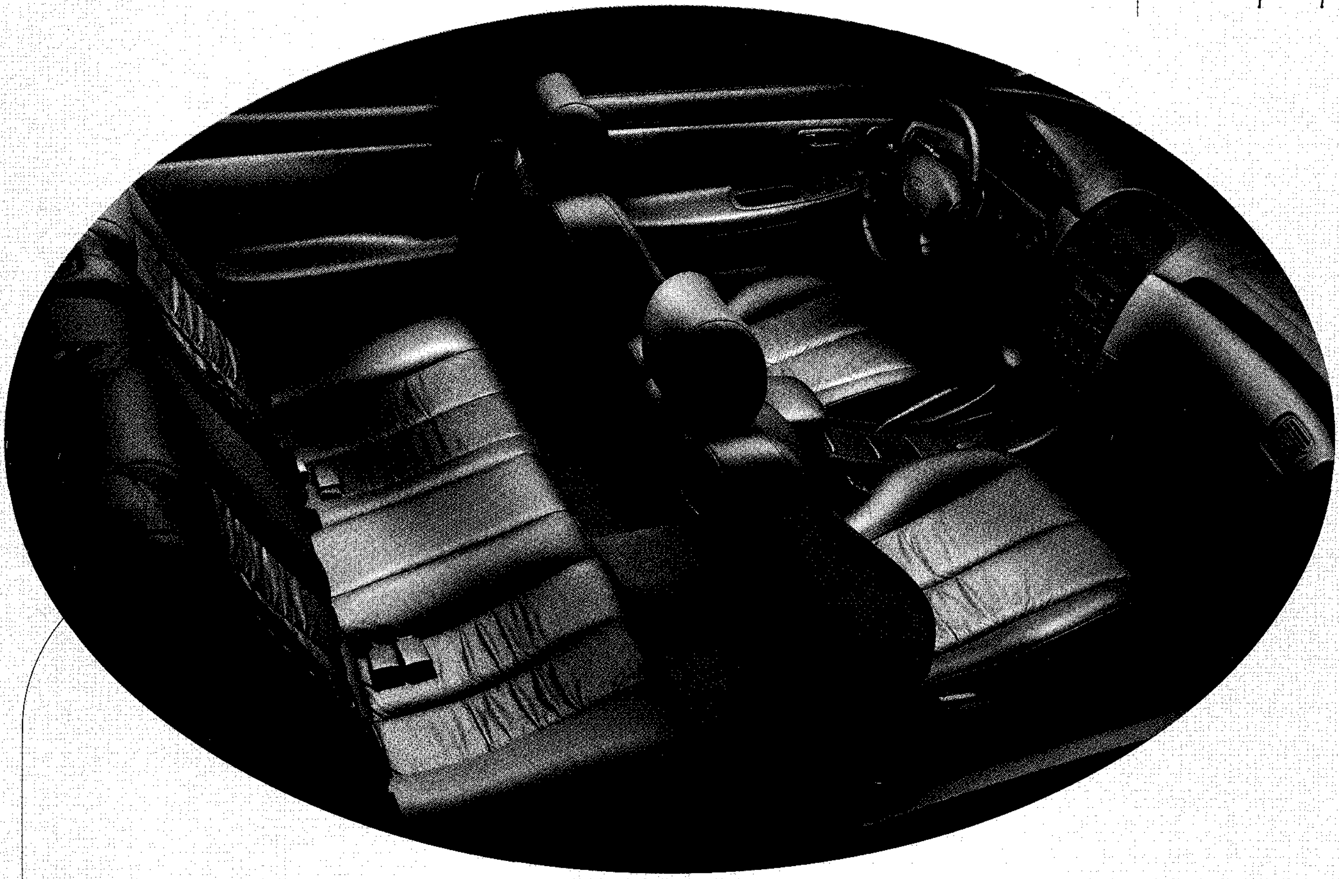

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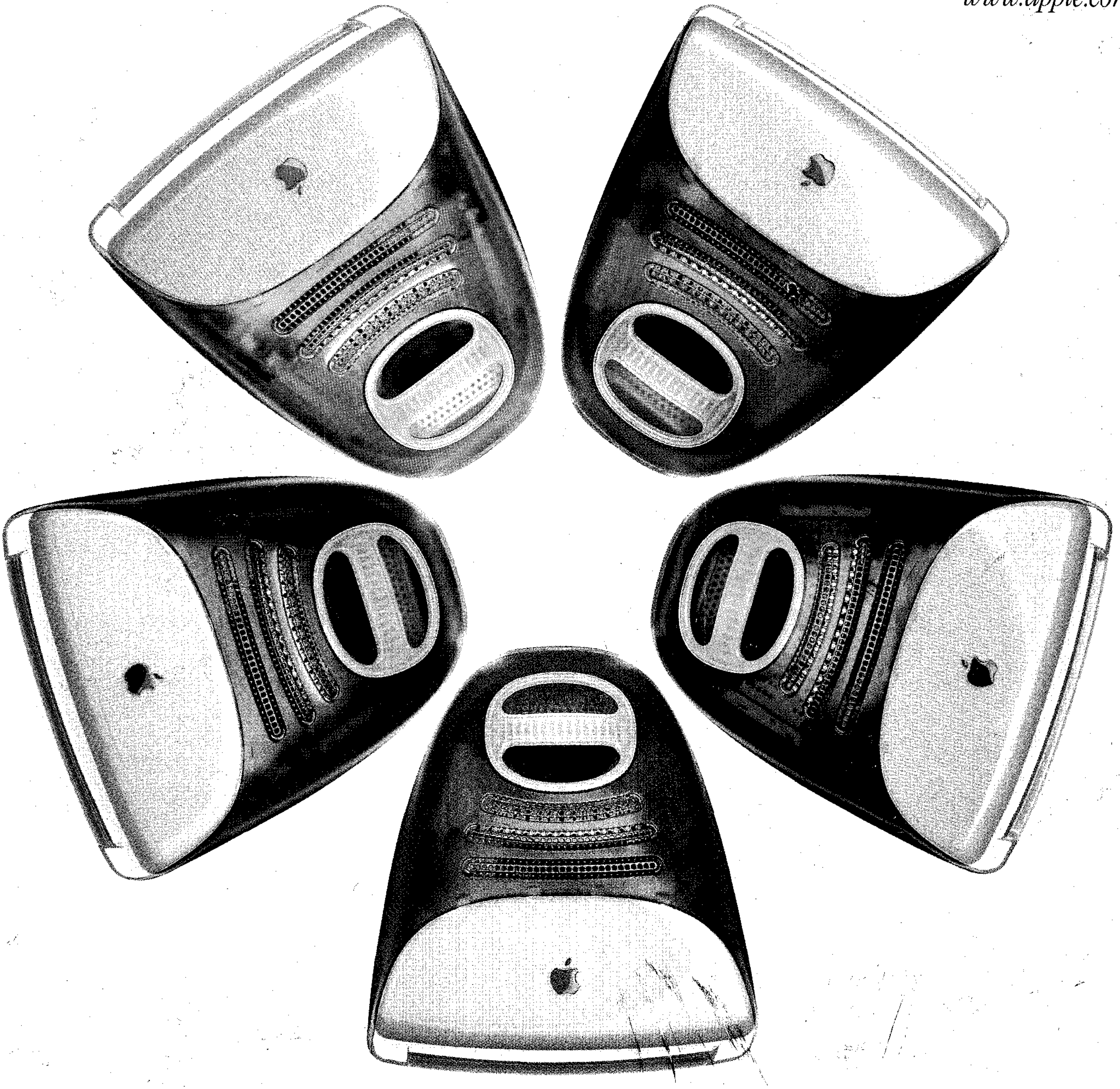
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